

GREAT TRUE MOUNTAIN STORIES

GREAT TRUE MOUNTAIN STORIES

Selected and introduced by

EDMUND V. CORBETT



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PREFACE

THE choice of the stories to be included in an anthology of this kind must inevitably be personal. In selecting extracts from so wide a field as that of mountaineering literature the editor has no easy task if his choice is to win universal approval. In the first instance the chosen episodes must be able to stand by themselves, they must be of the right length, they must be exciting and they must be graphically written.

Apart from these inescapable conditions, I have, in "Great True Mountain Stories," tried to maintain a balance between the major Himalayan climbs of the present century and the Alpine climbs of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Everest, Annapurna, Nanga Parbat, K2 and Kangchenjunga are all included as are the chief adventures in the Alps. In addition an attempt has been made to accommodate a few stories which although not world-famous have a human interest sufficient to warrant inclusion, or, alternatively, are remarkable for the author's powers of description, revealing Nature's many moods upon the mountains. Hannibal's crossing of the Alps is a mountain adventure very different from the others included herein but it will for ever remain one of the greatest episodes of military and mountain history. Finally, in view of the frequency with which the layman asks why mountaineers willingly submit themselves to the hazards which so many of these stories reveal, the answer given by one of the world's greatest climbers to this perennial question has been included—that of A. F. Mummery whose own irresistible love of mountains finally led to his death on Nanga Parbat.

E. V. CORBETT

GREAT TRUE MOUNTAIN STORIES

I

LONE VICTORY

from

NANGA PARBAT¹

incorporating the official report of the expedition of 1953

by KARL M. HERRLIGKOFFER

Translated and additional material supplied by
Eleanor Brockett and Anton Ehrenzweig

One month after the British ascent of Everest the Austro-German expedition planted its flags on the summit of Nanga Parbat, the mighty peak of 26,620 feet which commands the western end of the Himalayas.

Nanga Parbat is generally reckoned to be one of the most difficult mountaineering problems of the Himalayas and has a grim record of tragedies. It was first attempted in 1895 by A. F. Mummery who lost his life in so doing, together with two Ghurkas who accompanied him. Further deaths took place in the expedition of 1934 and in 1937 when a German expedition was at grips with the mountain an enormous avalanche buried the whole team of seven climbers and nine porters, including the cream of Germany's mountaineers, the greatest disaster of mountaineering history. Finally the mountain claimed yet two more lives in 1950 when two young English climbers were swept away in a blizzard.

Thus at the time the 1953 expedition was launched Nanga Parbat had accounted for the deaths of fourteen climbers and seventeen porters. The first assault having failed in bad weather, Otto Kempter and Hermann Buhl made a second attempt. Kempter was overcome with exhaustion but Buhl pressed on alone while the weather held, carrying with him no tent, no food and no sleeping-bag, not even his emergency sleeping-bag which he had removed from his anorak. His comrades waited for his return in suspense, fearing the worst and remembering the sad fate that had overtaken Mummery on his solo climb nearly sixty years earlier. It was considered impossible to survive a night at 26,000 feet without shelter, yet somehow not only did Buhl survive but he realised his lifelong ambition in conquering the mountain. Exhausted, wandering and frost-bitten he struggled back to safety to give his own version of events in the account which follows. His epic story will survive as one of the greatest mountaineering adventures of all time.



¹Published by Elek Books, London, 1954.

"As I had been quite unable to sleep I was glad when it was 1 o'clock and time to get up. The storm had abated somewhat but it was still pitch-dark. Otto was well tucked into his sleeping bag and seemed oblivious to everything. He did not stir although I made a terrific clatter as I rooted around in the tent, brewed tea, dressed and packed my rucksack. Several times I urged him to get up, but he kept saying that it was too early and that yesterday I had said we would rise at 3 o'clock. I reminded him that we must make the fullest possible use of the day ahead of us and that we should be glad later on of every minute we gained now. I added that in any case I should be setting off at two and that if he were not ready I should have to go on alone. For the time being I packed everything necessary into my own rucksack, which made it quite a weight.

"Eventually Otto emerged from his chrysalis. I now thought that if I went on ahead and made the trail Otto would easily overtake me, and so that I should not have to carry everything myself I left some of the stuff behind for him, among other things Kuno's bacon, which was to be the summit ration. I was later to regret this bitterly. At 2.30 a.m. I crawled out of the tent and started on my way.

"The night was star-lit and the crescent moon threw her silvery light along the ridge which stretched away ahead of me. It was calm and cold. I put on everything I could. Across a hard, steep spur of compressed snow I regained the top of the ridge. Here on the spine the going was treacherous. I buckled on my crampons and felt able to move with greater freedom. In thrilling soaring leaps the ridge rose steeply before me. To the right giant snow slopes, broken by icy barriers, plunged to the plateau above Camp II; to the left my way was skirted by dark rock formations, while beyond the eye was lost in unimaginable depths. A biting wind came up from the south and forced me on to the Rakhiot side. At the start of the traverse to the Silver Saddle I paused for a rest. It was 5 a.m. and behind the Karakoram the sun was rising in golden splendour. Caught in the brilliance of the first rays an undulating sea of summits greeted me: beautiful Chogori, trapezoidal Masherbrum, the bishop's mitre of Rakaposhi, the black granite of the Mustag Tower. In the valleys a fine mist hovered, the best of weather portents.

Blissfully I basked in the early sunshine as I took my morning refreshment. Otto was still a good way behind me—I estimated it at an hour's climb—but I never doubted for a moment that he would eventually catch up with me.

"The *Firn* was hard and in places patches of bare, bluish iridescent ice came to the surface. Distances were most deceptive. The rocks of Silver Crag stubbornly refused to come any nearer and another two hours had passed before I was standing on the Silver Saddle, at the edge of the great *Firn* plateau. How often had I dreamed of this moment!

"My altimeter registered 24,275 feet. So far I had made pretty good time. I was not terribly affected by the height. I was having to take two breaths for each step. After another short rest I continued on my way. The *Firn* plateau went on for about two miles, at first rising gently but later inclining steeply up to the Fore-Summit; the difference in height amounted to about 1,500 feet.

"The *Firn* had been ploughed by the high winds into undulations three feet high. This meant a perpetual clambering up and down which greatly slowed down progress. At 25,000 feet I seemed to reach the limit of my capacity. Suddenly my body felt paralysed, my lungs could not expand, and every step demanded tremendous effort. My pauses for rest became more and more frequent, and I was acutely conscious of the thinness of the air.

"Otto did not seem to be faring any better. It was quite some time before I caught sight of his figure on the Silver Saddle advancing slowly, silhouetted against the skyline. I saw him stop and then sink down. Otto had given up. This in itself was more or less immaterial to me but with my tongue parched and my stomach rumbling I could not but think of the bacon in Otto's rucksack which was now lost to me.

"On the Silver Plateau the sun was scorching, the air was terribly dry and not a breath of wind was stirring. After each rest I had to force myself to get up and carry on, so great was the temptation to go on lying where I was. The steep rise to the Fore-Summit seemed to get not one whit nearer although I had now been pegging away for hours. My idea that I should reach the summit by midday was completely set at naught. I now directed my steps over to the extreme edge of the plateau where

it dropped away into the southern face. I hoped that a cool breeze might be coming up from the south. But here too the air was perfectly still.

"The weight of my rucksack became intolerable and when at length I reached the foot of the rise to the Fore-Summit I took it off and left it behind. I reckoned on being back there before nightfall. I tied my anorak round my waist by the sleeves, having first stuffed the summit flag, my camera, spare gloves and drinking flask in the pockets. I also stowed away some Pervitin, and also Padutin in case of frost-bite, picked up my ice-axe and continued on my way.

"The going was now decidedly easier; the pauses became less frequent and, summoning all my will-power, I tracked along below the Fore-Summit to the right in the direction of a declivity between the Fore-Summit and the Diamir depression. Once more the distance proved to be greater than it had appeared. I began to have doubts whether I should be able to keep going long enough, but in any case the Fore-Summit was within my grasp. It just missed being in the 26,000 feet class, but anyhow mine would be the first ascent. The Pervitin I was carrying gave me confidence; I felt I could rely on it in case of emergency. Just 300 feet below the Fore-Summit I set foot on the above-mentioned declivity."

Buhl had now reached the highest point hitherto attained. This was just about where Aschenbrenner and Schneider had stood when in 1934 they had climbed to within 150 feet of the Fore-Summit. It was also roughly the point where all possible ascent routes converged. Mummery in 1895 had aimed at the Bazhin Gap, and the route over the North Summit reconnoitred by Harrer, Aufschnaiter and Lobenhoffer in 1939 would also run into the Rakhiot route at approximately this point. From this juncture Schneider had conjectured that the route to the summit continued by a descent to the snowfield below the Bazhin Gap and then up the summit shoulder either by a central rib on its north-eastern flank or by a traverse of the main east ridge from the Bazhin Gap. Buhl decided to traverse direct from the declivity towards the Bazhin Gap and the main east ridge, without descending to the snowfield below. His narrative continues:

"My traverse across the rocks to the Bazhin Gap took me over snow and ice, deeply terraced and strewn with boulders. It was already 2 p.m. A steep rocky ridge crowded with snow towers, vertical pitches of sharp-edged granite, badly exposed cornices and steep flanks of compressed snow, now lay between me and the shoulder. Assessing all these difficulties I remembered the Pervitin and took two tablets. I should need every ounce of energy and will-power I could muster. I knew that the drug would remain effective for only six to seven hours and that I must reach some resting place by that time.

"A steep ridge of compressed snow led to the foot of the rocks. At this point the mountain-face plunged in a vertical drop of several miles direct from the ridge. Once or twice I looked through crevices which had formed between the rock and the ice into the gaping void below. Never had I seen such an abyss.

"I laboured doggedly on from one rise to the next, treating every single pitch as an objective in itself. When once more the summit revealed itself far above me I simply could not realise that that was my ultimate objective. Finally I had to scale a thirty-foot overhang which obstructed the access to a *couloir* which in turn led farther up. At the end of the ridge, which was in parts very severe, a massive and upright gendarme still barred the way. It was impossible to climb over it so I had somehow to circumvent it. The rock was very brittle and called for extreme care. The last rise before the shoulder consisted of a very steep and long slope of hard compressed snow. This presented no special problem but it demanded great exertion. With my last reserves of energy I managed to work myself up the few feet which still separated me from the ridge. At 6 p.m. I stood at last on the shoulder at an altitude of about 26,250 feet.

"I felt that I had reached the limit of my endurance.

"Naturally, as a climber, I realised that I was now on the last lap to the summit. But it might just as well have been any other summit in my native Tyrol. This may seem incredible but that was how I felt. I was simply not conscious of the fact that I was at that moment at grips with our own Nanga Parbat, an untrodden peak of over 26,000 feet, the summit to which no less than seven expeditions had gone forth, the mountain which had claimed so many lives. . . .

"I took a last gulp of coca-tea, which offered some fleeting refreshment. Then I traversed into the northern face. Steep and rough, a tumbled mass of boulders now led up to the summit, still about 300 feet above me. I now left the ski-sticks behind and—I could do it in no other way—scrambled up on all fours.* Suddenly I realised that I could go no higher. . . . I was on the summit.

"I was not, I must confess, at the time fully conscious of the significance of that moment, nor did I have any feeling of elation at my victory. I simply felt relieved to be on top and to know that all the sweat and toil of the ascent were behind me.

"It was about 7 p.m. I at once took the small Tyrolese pennant from the pocket of my anorak, tied it to my ice-axe, took a photograph and tucked the pennant away again to take back to my club. Then I got out the flag of the country whose guests we were, Pakistan, fastened it to my ice-axe, changed films and took some more photographs—down towards Rakhiot Peak, towards the Fore-Summit, the Plateau and the Silver Saddle. My eye scanned the three mile drop into the Rupal valley where the setting sun was throwing the mighty shadow of the mountain on which I stood far out into the land. I looked all round me, eastward into the Himalaya, northward to the Karakoram with the Pamirs and the Hindukush adjoining farther west. To the south I could see over and beyond many 16,000 feet peaks.

"It was 7.10 p.m. when I left the summit pyramid. The sun was just disappearing on the horizon, and although the rocks still held some of the heat of the day, it immediately became very cold. The ridge seemed to me to be too difficult and dangerous for the purposes of descent, so I thought of trying to get down across the *Firn* flank facing the Diamir side. Unaccountably I had left my ice-axe on the summit so I had only the two ski-sticks with which to keep my balance. This carelessness might well have proved to be my undoing, for I was standing right in the middle of the traverse when suddenly

* Schneider had given warning that the climb to the shoulder, while quite within the bounds of possibility, might well prove to be technically the most difficult section of the whole ascent, but had declared that the stretch from the shoulder to the summit appeared to be a broad and easy rise negotiable by anything from "a handcart to a small motor-car". The experience of Hillary and Tensing on Everest was the reverse of Buhl's. The summit was presumed to be rocky but they found it was a smooth, gentle snow-rise

my right crampon slipped off my boot. I just managed to grab it in time but the strap went overboard.

"I was left like a stork standing on the smooth, hard surface on one crampon, supporting myself on the two ski-sticks and without an idea as to how I should extricate myself. With extreme caution I finally succeeded in reaching some rocky ground.

"When I had dropped about 450 feet from the summit, night suddenly closed in on me. Some distance away I could just see the outline of a large rock and I now groped my way towards it. Supporting my body against the mountainside which inclined at an angle of about 50° , I spent the night standing on this rock.

"I thought longingly of my bivouac equipment which was waiting for me in my rucksack at the foot of the Fore-Summit. I only had my thin pullover on; my heavy one, the tent-sack and my other spare clothing were all in the rucksack.

"Finally, as Karl had been at great pains to impress on me that I should do in case of an emergency bivouac, I took a few pills of Padutin.

"It was 9 p.m. when the darkness forced me to bivouac against the mountain, standing on that unsteady chunk of rock. To the west the last light of day was gradually being extinguished. My rest did me good, even if I was standing all the time. The hours passed surprisingly quickly. I dozed, nodding a little now and again, then jerking myself upright once more. Then a cold shiver would run through me. But it was all quite bearable. The only trouble was that my feet gradually lost all feeling, for I could not keep them moving sufficiently. It was not until nearly 2 a.m. that the moon appeared. Its silvery crescent hung just above the summit, lighting up miraculously the slopes of the North and Fore-Summits below me and casting its light right over to the Bazhin Gap. But I was not in its floodlit path; the flank remained in shadow. So I had to go on waiting until dawn should break.

"As the morning of 4th July approached it became increasingly cold. On the eastern horizon a pale streak showed in the sky. But it was still too dark for climbing and it was not until 4 a.m. that I was able to continue my descent. I had no feeling whatsoever in my feet, my boots were frozen stiff and the rubber

soles were glazed with ice. All this called for extreme care. Every step had to be well considered even where the gradient was not particularly steep; the smallest error of judgment could have been fatal.

"If I did only one slight slip in the snow this took so much out of me that I needed minutes to collect myself again. After overcoming a difficult pitch which once again left me completely out of breath I stood at last on the steep iron-hard snowfield which led up to the Bazhin Gap. At around midday I eventually reached the rocks at the Diamir depression. As these offered but very slight hand-holds I took off both pairs of gloves and stuffed them in my pockets. When later I went to put them on again I found that one pair was missing. I have no idea what could have happened to them.

"Throughout this day I had the feeling that I was not alone, that someone was accompanying me. Many times I found myself in the act of turning round to address my companion, and when I was looking for my gloves he told me that I had lost them. It was only when I looked round that I realised that I was alone.

"The sun beat down without mercy. I took a rest and fell asleep for a short time. I awoke feeling ravenously hungry and with a raging thirst. I was so absolutely parched that I was obsessed with the thought of drinking. Now and again I heard voices above me and hoped it might be Hans or Walter coming to meet me with a flask of tea. But no one came. I continued to drag myself on with what help I could get from the ski-sticks, to the Diamir depression which lay about 100 feet up. It seemed quite incredible now, that only the day before I had been able to climb to the summit.

"At last I reached the Diamir depression. Before me lay once more the vast sweep of the Silver Plateau. I could no longer swallow nor speak. Bloodstained slaver oozed from my mouth. I longed to get at my rucksack, for hunger was torturing me no less than thirst. I stumbled about among the hard furrows. It was some time before I could locate the rucksack, then finally I fell down beside it. I could not swallow dry food, but I made myself a wonderfully refreshing concoction of Dextro-energen and snow and after a prolonged rest began to feel better again.

Far away on the Silver Saddle I saw two specks. Oh, the joy of it! Someone was coming! I heard voices too, calling my name.

"But what was wrong? The two specks remained static. There was no movement in them. Then I realised that they were rocks. How bitter, how painful was this disillusion! My rests became more and more frequent, the pauses ever longer. I would struggle along for twenty or thirty yards then once more would I be fettered and held in total collapse. Two to three steps demanded ten rapid gasps for breath, then twenty, then still more, until eventually I could go on no longer. Then would follow another long rest, and then the agony would start all over again.

"In this fashion I reached the lowest point of the plateau. I was on the very brink of despair as I floundered among the petrified waves of this vast expanse of fluted *Firn*.

"The counter-gradient to the Silver Saddle seemed endless. I now resorted once more to Pervitin. Whatever reserves of energy were left must now be mobilised, otherwise I should be finished.

"At 5.30 p.m. I stood at last on the Silver Saddle and, looking down, saw two men standing near the Moor's Head. The sight of them gave me fresh impetus and as though buoyed up anew by some secret force I went ahead with greater ease."

As Buhl staggered and swayed down the last few feet of the ridge he fell into the arms of Hans Ertl who had gone up to meet him. He looked aged by twenty years. His face, desiccated and deeply lined, bore the imprint of intolerable suffering. From his lips fell the words: "Yesterday was the finest day of my life." Although torn with grief at the sight of his friend's agony, Ertl filmed Buhl's last steps to the tent and so put on permanent record the final moments of this unique adventure.

II

MIRACULOUS ESCAPE ON THE NEVADO HUANTSÁN

from

THE UNTRODDEN ANDES¹

by C. G. EGELER

in co-operation with T. de Booy

Translated from the Dutch by W. E. James

C. Egeler and T. de Booy were to have taken part in a Dutch expedition to the Himalayas which through financial reasons fell through. Learning in 1950 that the Himalayan trip was definitely off they looked round for another project and in so doing had their attention attracted to the Andes with the Cordillera Blanca as their objective and the unconquered Nevado Huantsán as their ultimate goal.

Whilst in the French Alps in 1950 the two made the acquaintance of Lionel Terray, a professional guide from Chamonix, a man of first-class experience including the French expedition which had conquered Annapurna. He was invited to become a third member of the Andes Expedition, 1952. In mid-June the party set off for the Huantsán and commenced the attack on June 20th.

Although the expedition met with ultimate success this first attack was doomed to failure and involved a serious accident in which De Booy miraculously survived a fall of some 300 feet and a subsequent enforced bivouac. The story of this accident, which took place as the three men were descending the northern ridge by roping down its west flank in a succession of rappels, is told in the following pages. It commences with the party made ready for the first rappel.



At long last, all was ready. A few curt final instructions, and Terray slid down. About 200 feet below, at the end of the rope, he cut out a broad step in the ice-wall. Then I followed—first over a bulge, then a short distance dangling through the air, and finally down the steep ice-pitch of which the lower portion of the flank consisted. By the time I arrived, Terray had already hammered in a long ice-piton for the next rappel. We waited

side by side, with our faces to the wall, until De Booy could join us. He had a most ticklish job. Whilst Terray during his descent had been secured by me at the end of the rope, and I, in turn, had been safeguarded by De Booy, the latter now had to lower himself down by the double rope unsecured. He naturally went to work with the utmost caution, particularly when tackling the first stage over the bulge.

Terray and I looked at each other. Up above, when it looked as though we were caught like rats in a trap, he had been definitely apprehensive. Now he was back again to true form. He grinned at me and said :

"What a game! Ever been up against anything like this, Kees? Who would have guessed, this morning. . . ?"

I smiled back. His magnificent self-assurance was infectious. I no longer doubted that, under his skilful guidance, we should extricate ourselves from this ugly situation. Nevertheless, we were not happy about the next rappel. The steep ice-wall (about 60°) on which we were poised went down another 100 feet or so and then abruptly ended in a void. Apparently the wall overhung at that point, but how far it projected and what came underneath were imponderables. We could only assume that it would be exceptionally steep. We were, we thought, about 300 feet above the glacier at the moment. But the foot of the wall was not visible.

To our great relief De Booy joined us safe and sound on our little artificial shelf. We could now restart roping down from the lower piton. But would the rope be long enough to reach over the bulging overhang and enable us to gain a foothold lower down? Again Lionel went first so that he could make preparations as quickly as possible for the succeeding stage. About 100 feet down, he reached the edge of the bulge and could see what lay below.

"Ca touche nettement!" he called up. This was great news, for visibility was fading fast and we had not a moment to spare. A second later he disappeared from view, whilst De Booy and I waited in suspense. Then a vague reverberating shout came from below. To us above, it was completely incomprehensible. The words were lost under the overhang. Yet it was essential for me to know what awaited me down below, so I bellowed out to

Terray that I could not catch what he was shouting. De Booy and I waited anxiously, debating what to do next. Then we felt the tension on the rope slacken, indicating that Terray had found a foothold somewhere and had released the rope. Once again several precious minutes were lost. Then, further hesitation being out of the question, I let myself down the rope as quickly as possible until I reached the edge of the overhang. Peering warily over, I saw Terray about 80 feet directly below, clinging to the rock face.

The situation was unpleasant. The overhang projected so far out that the whole of the next 80 feet down had to be descended through space. Never before had I been faced with such a manoeuvre. Thank goodness I was being secured from above by my companion. There was not much time to dally. De Booy had asked me to give him a shout as to the position so I called out that the rappel went fairly deep and that everything seemed all right. Then cautiously turning over on my stomach, I let my legs dangle into nothing, slid over the edge, and in the failing light began to descend the thin rope. This swaying through space made an unforgettable impression on my mind. The upper crust of the overhang was fringed with enormous icicles, one of which broke off as I accidentally came in contact with it and went tinkling past me down into the void. It was eerie.

If it had not been for the pressing time factor this would have been a thrilling adventure; but, suspended there, I was all too conscious that the occasion was not just another interesting descent. It was grim reality. A desperate race against time.

Farther down the wall receded sharply away. I lowered myself, feeling very much like a spider on its thread, until my foot touched the ice-wall below. What a relief! As always, after a long descent by rope, it was wonderful to find one's feet again. Actually I had quite a job to get a footing, for the flank on which I landed was pitched at a gradient of at least 65° and I was almost at the end of the rope. There was little scope for manoeuvring. Luckily Terray came to my assistance and cut out a few steps for me. He himself had had the greatest difficulty in arriving safely. What was worse, he found himself suddenly hampered by stubborn cramp in the arm.

I simply could not manage to get any more favourable stance

than one with holds for one foot and one hand. I waited quietly for the next move, hoping that it would not take too long. It was De Booy's turn to come down. As experience had shown that it was useless to call out from below, I untied myself and gave three hard tugs at the rope, that being the agreed signal for him to follow down. He understood, for immediately there was a movement in the rope. Two minutes later his dim shadow appeared above on the edge of the overhang. In the meantime darkness had descended apace. A last spark of light seemed to linger on the spot where De Booy stood, but below the bulge, where we were, everything was shrouded in dusk. We exchanged a few words. De Booy asked what the position was like, and I shouted to him to try and land as high up the slope as possible because the rope was too short to allow of much playing about for position. I implored him to take the utmost care. One end of the rope was longer than the other, I bawled, but he ought to be able to manage.

Like some dim ghost De Booy slid down the thin nylon rope. Everything was going so swimmingly that I jocularly complimented him on his style. But, as he tried to get a foothold on the ice just above me, the treacherous light misled him. The slope was far steeper than he thought. His feet slid away. His hands found no hold on the slippery rock, covered with verglas. The heavy weight of his rucksack pulled him down and over backwards, and . . .

He fell.

To my horror he fell past me. Several yards lower, however, he was brought up with a jerk, hanging head downward, his feet tangled in the rope. I frantically concentrated on ways and means of rescuing him. My own delicate position prevented me from getting nearer. The wall, where I was precariously poised, was terribly steep, and the rocks at my side were covered with ice. Somehow or other I managed to grasp the looped end of the longer rope which was hanging loosely down and gave it a turn round my hand. Then, by grabbing the other rope, I formed, as it were, a continuous ring of rope, from a part of which De Booy hung upside-down. This action, I thought, would at least reduce the possibility of his slipping away. My brain worked feverishly, taking in every detail, trying to straighten out things,

wondering whether De Booy's hands were also still clinging to the rope. If his feet did not untangle, he might be able to hold out until Terray came to his aid. I saw the latter some ten yards to our right on the slope, busily unearthing his torch from his rucksack. It had all happened in a matter of seconds, and as yet he had noticed nothing amiss. Only when I lustily yelled for help did he realise what was up. Then, without even giving himself time to grasp his axe, he sped across the wall towards us. And once again my heart stood still! He, too, missed his footing.

Some forty feet or so farther down he managed, in his own inimitable way, to save himself. Thank God! For a moment he was completely dazed: he had wrenched his arm. I cried out to him to do his utmost, for De Booy's life was in peril. He could not possibly hang on the rope much longer.

De Booy was aware of this, too, for he said in a remarkably quiet voice:

"This is it, Kees! It's all over with us."

But I still had hope. I called out that it wasn't all over! He must do everything to hang on! Then, I focused my attention again on Terray who, on my other side, was laboriously climbing up the steep slope. It was slow, agonisingly slow. I spurred him on: "Quicker, Lionel, much quicker!"

Then I heard a rending noise. I turned instantly to the other side, only to see De Booy plunging down towards the glacier. For a dramatic second or two I followed his fall as his crampons scraped the rock and sent up showers of sparks. Then he vanished in the void. A terrible silence followed.

Terray and I clung, petrified, to the face. Black despair for our comrade choked us. I saw no reason to call out. De Booy could hardly have escaped being killed.

Staring into the darkness below, I thought I could distinguish a vague dark blob against the white snow. From his greater distance Lionel had secured a rather better view. He had the feeling that, if De Booy had not bashed his head against projecting rocks and had avoided falling into the bergschrund, he might possibly be alive. He called at the top of his voice: "Tom! Tom!" The dead silence seemed to confirm our worst fears; but Terray kept on calling and suddenly there came an answer—an unmistakable answer!

What a wonderful moment that was! To hear a voice, as it were, from the dead! For a time we were almost too astounded to react. Then we realised that the incredible had happened. An excited babble of Dutch and French went up. Anxiously we yelled to ask what he had broken. From the depths came the laconic reply: "Nothing!"

A few moments later we saw a tiny light appear some hundreds of feet below. We had brought out with us special "forehead" lamps in case we ever had to climb in the dark. The light was fastened on an elastic band which went round the forehead, thus enabling one to have the hands free. De Booy had obviously put his on to show us where he was. Seeing his light was our signal to get into action. Terray climbed up towards me and pulled at the end of the rope, but it wouldn't budge. This was the worst that could possibly happen at such a critical time. The nightmare thought of a jammed rope after a rappel over an overhang is always enough to give any climber grey hairs. Terray pulled with increasing force. He raged and swore—and, curiously enough, it seemed as though this helped, for suddenly the rope freed itself and was easily pulled through. Terray worked with might and main to prepare a new rappel. Once it had been rigged up, I was able to leave my awkward position and slide downwards, feeling my way in the dark. The rope reached to about 65 feet above the bergschrund. I cut a big step with my axe and then waited for Terray to join me.

Meanwhile I could talk more easily with De Booy. My disquiet lessened considerably when he called out: "Why the devil are you two taking so long? I showed you the quick way down, didn't I?" This was an encouraging sign. That he could still wise-crack cheered me up no end. I saw his light going to and fro and assumed that he was moving about to keep warm. He even climbed a little way up the slope to give me some light when, a little later, I came, via the bergschrund, on to the glacier. Terray followed closely behind. The three of us stood united again at the foot of the slope.

In the dark it was naturally impossible to trace the line of De Booy's fall. Not until next day were we able to assess its length and direction. But even in the dark one could tell that he had fallen at least 300 feet. He had been hanging upside down when

he started falling and must have turned a somersault. His feet had struck the rock face some yards lower down and had taken the first brunt of his fall.

This probably saved his life. The steep ice-wall down which he had slithered with ever-increasing velocity was actually fraught with much less danger. We reckoned that he cleared the gaping mouth of the bergschrund which, at this point, was several yards wide, by sailing right over it. Landing on the sloping glacier, he had gradually lost speed because it was thickly covered with snow.

At that time all this did not interest us so much as finding out if he really were uninjured. It was almost unbelievable. He was examined in the light of our torches and prodded all over. A first glance only revealed a skinned nose. He complained of pains in the back. How could it be otherwise after a fall of some 300 feet? He was also chilled to the marrow, a poor condition to be in with the prospect of an ice-cold bivouac at a height of 18,000 feet without tent or sleeping-bag. It was clear now that we should have to spend the night on the glacier, for De Booy was in no fit state to cope with a descent lasting several hours.

As soon as we found a more or less suitable spot we levelled it off as far as possible and laid down the ropes to insulate us a little from the rising glacial cold and to keep us as dry as possible. We then put on everything that we could find in the shape of clothing. We took off our boots and put on dry socks. Then we got into our nylon bivouac-sets, consisting of a long anorak and a narrow bag in which to place the legs, the so-called *pied d'éléphant*. Both parts fastened together with press studs.

We also drew our rucksacks over our feet to help keep them warm, and thus installed ourselves for the night. For extra security we belayed ourselves with ropes attached by a turn or two to axes rammed in the ice—a necessary precaution, as several yards away down the slope an enormous crevasse gaped open and we had no desire to slide into this in our sleep.

Actually we hardly snatched any sleep. The air was crystal clear and the pitiless cold cut us to the bone. Terray and I had De Booy between us, and were continually rubbing and massaging him, but we found it difficult to keep him at all warm. We ourselves had to keep on piano-playing with our fingers and toes. Blood circulation had to be maintained at all costs to prevent

frost bite. If we dozed off, it was only to wake a moment later, disturbed by some movement of the others or tormented by the terrible thirst from which we now all suffered.

I unearthed a lemon from my rucksack and squeezed some of its juice on lumps of sugar, which I tried to get to De Booy. But it was no good. The acid lemon-juice caused him acute agony, owing to split lips. Then I tried to obtain some water to drink by filling my field-flask with snow and putting it under my clothes against the bare flesh. Apparently I, too, must have been near freezing-point, because the snow did not melt.

There is no comparison between a bivouac in the Cordillera Blanca and one in the Alps. In Europe a bivouac lasts only about seven hours and one can get going again towards four in the morning. In the Andes it gets dark about six and the night lasts a full twelve hours. Even when dawn breaks, no start is possible because it is still too freezingly cold and the risk of frost-bite is too great.

It seemed that the wretched night would never end. We tried to divert our thoughts. Amongst other titbits, Terray told us of the many bivouacs he had endured in his career. He spoke of that terrible night on the Annapurna when, at an altitude of 23,000 feet, he had huddled in a crevasse with his companions, two of whom, Lachenal and Herzog, were suffering horribly from frost-bitten extremities. His last bivouac had occurred the previous winter on the vertical face of the Fitz Roy in Patagonia.

None of us had much heart for talk. Our thoughts were too taken up by our recent nerve-racking experiences and by the miraculous turn of events. What would have happened if De Booy had broken an arm or a leg? He could not possibly have survived this bleak icy bivouac. Yet there he was between us, apparently unscathed. We wondered if and when we should ever be able to renew the attack.

Thinking of the past eventful hours, I realised that it was not only De Booy who had enjoyed fantastic luck. Terray, too, might have hurtled precipitously down that face. And, if both of them had been seriously injured, what chance should I have had, without a light, to grope my way down that wall in the dark? Yes, we were all lucky to be still alive and kicking.

III

THE FURGGEN RIDGE

from

THE MATTERHORN¹

by GUIDO REY

Translated from the Italian by J. E. C. Eaton

The Italian guide Guido Rey was first attracted to the Matterhorn as a boy of thirteen when on his first Alpine ascent up a 6,600 feet peak, the lofty pyramid was pointed out to him. He subsequently climbed it on a number of occasions and by new routes. Among his most famous climbs was the attempted ascent by the Furggen Ridge, by a route attempted unsuccessfully by Mummery in 1880, who was brought to a halt by the smooth perpendicular wall of the last cliff.

Rey's attempt by this route was defeated within an ace of victory. So near in fact was victory that Rey tells us that at the time the retreat was decided upon a telegram was being despatched from Zermatt to the effect that the ascent of the Matterhorn by the Furggen Ridge had been accomplished, for so it appeared to watchers from below.

Shortly afterwards, however, Rey's ambition was to be satisfied in rather a curious manner for on reflection he decided that it mattered little whether the last few remaining yards of the cliff were to be gained by ascent or descent, and, climbing the Matterhorn by the ordinary Italian route he then made the descent of the Furggen Ridge to the point previously reached on the ascent. Thus he was able to claim the exploration of the whole route.

This account tells how the last few yards of the ridge were finally attained and of Rey's satisfaction in having accomplished his ambition. As the final paragraph of the story shows, however, Rey's conquest of the ridge by subtility rather than by one complete ascent did not subsequently appear to be the victory he first thought it to be. Most readers will no doubt agree with his final verdict.



I HAD not even dreamt of suggesting to my guides that we should follow our former route; I felt that they would have refused. That was one of the things that no man does more than once in his life. Moreover, it seemed to me that with regard to those few yards of cliff, it was all the same whether one climbed them

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up or down. Setting all pedantry aside, I reasoned like the fox with the grapes.

So we started off to ascend the Matterhorn by the ordinary Italian route, intending to descend the Furggen Ridge as far as the point we had reached on the ascent, thus making our exploration complete.

We were provided with two long rope-ladders.

Early in the morning we started from the hut in two parties.

The morning was perfectly clear; not a cloud was visible anywhere on the vast horizon.

Our feet seemed to have wings; we passed the Grande Corde, the Crête de Coq and the Shoulder without my perceiving them; my mind was so busy with what was to come that the ascent, fine though it was, made no impression upon me that day.

And this explains why it is possible to climb up and down the Matterhorn without seeing or perceiving any of its beauties, when the mind is either fearful or inattentive, too full of thought or too empty.

"Diable! Le Mont Blanc a mis son chapeau!" exclaimed one of us during a halt on the Shoulder for breakfast.

This was bad news, for it is well known how quickly a hat of cloud on the head of the monarch of the Alps widens its brim in such a way as soon to cover all the other mountains.

Our halt was a very short one, and we went on faster than before.

By seven we were on the Pic Tyndall, before nine we reached the summit. The wind had begun to blow from a bad quarter, and the clouds from Mont Blanc had reached our neighbour, the Dent d'Hérens.

On the top we found a single climber with his guide, and the former, hearing me address the latter in German, recognised me for an Italian.

He was an Italian too, and we shook hands with much pleasure; one meets so few Italians on the summit of the Matterhorn!

He was most cordial, and he offered me a cup of champagne.

When my party of porters appeared in a long line on the snow-ridge, he looked at them with curiosity and asked me who they were. I denied all knowledge of their identity.

Time pressed, and I cut the conversation short with another handshake and moved on.

I wonder what my compatriot's thoughts were as he saw us all starting down in a direction quite different from the one parties generally take.

I fancied I heard his guide shout out in German that that way was not "go," but I did not turn round.

The first bit of the descent towards Furggen is broad and easy, but so broken that at every step one starts and sends down stones.

The storm was very near, and the tension of our minds was very great.

We descended about 160 feet, to where the slope begins to grow steeper as the head of the Matterhorn bends towards the precipice below.

At eleven we reached the exact spot where Daniel's party had taken up their stand on the day of the first attempt, and whence they had sent us down the rope. The iron spike which had helped in the work was still there, firmly fixed in the rock.

The porters had halted a few steps farther back. I was left alone on the little platform whilst my guides went on to see whether it was possible to go down farther in order to descend by ordinary means as much of the cliff as might be.

The first mists had meanwhile reached the Matterhorn.

They advanced capriciously, blown up by the gusts of wind, wrapped us suddenly about, and vanished again; it seemed as if the wind created them out of nothing and blew them back into nothingness once more. In the intervals when the mist encompassed us, the sun still shone warmly and pleasantly.

In the meanwhile my guides kept appearing and disappearing before my eyes; I could see them at a few yards from me, looking down on the Italian side for a way, and I could hear them talking together excitedly. But apparently there was no practicable route, or at least the mists prevented their finding it.

Down towards the Theodul everything was by now completely overclouded; the huge precipice dominating the Val Tournanche was wreathed in dense mist; there came thunderclap after thunderclap, each nearer than the last, and when the dark curtain was drawn by the wind round the Matterhorn I

fancied I was enclosed in a very small space. Again the clouds were rent, and the sun shone through with a pallid light.

The rocks of the Matterhorn were still warm, but the cold breath of the storm had reached us. The Matterhorn was humming in the wind like a great organ pipe.

Twenty minutes had gone by when Aimé returned for the sack containing the ladders.

"Ca va?" I asked. "Oui, ça va," he replied; "préparez vous," and started down again with the sack. Then Antoine came to fetch me, and with him I went down the four or five yards that lay between me and the spot where they had fixed the rope.

This place, which I can see clearly in my mind's eye, was a narrow slab of rock, on which the guides crouched close together, not venturing to move, because the slightest movement would have been dangerous.

Their faces were very grave as they solemnly waited for the trial to begin.

We could see a few of the upper rungs of the rope ladder, which was fixed to the rock by iron spikes, but the rest was lost to view as it hung down the precipice.

Daniel told me to go down alone, but I insisted that Antoine should be the first to descend, as he deserved. While Antoine was tying himself on there came a rent in the clouds, which enabled us to see clearly enough.

Full of curiosity I peeped over the edge of the rock and, by the momentary gleam of light, I saw the whole piece down which we must go. It was overhanging. The ladder, which was about 16 yards long, hung down its whole length, and reached beyond the base of the pitch; its lower extremity lay unfastened on the rocky stair from which Antoine had tried to raise himself on our first attempt.

I recognised every detail; I saw a few yards off the spot where Antoine had swung to and fro, lower down the place where Aimé had waited, and lower still the patch of snow where I had stood.

I saw the scene again most clearly, just as I had seen it a few days before, but this time from above, not from below.

Meantime the ladder swayed gaily, as the wind tossed it to and fro like a light piece of ribbon. Then the clouds closed again

Antoine descended the ladder, while we, his companions, held him by the rope. He was out of sight for four or five minutes, I suppose, but I am not sure, for they seemed an eternity to me.

Then he shouted for us to pull on the rope, and a few minutes afterwards first his head and then his body reappeared over the edge of the cliff, like a diver returning to the surface. He was very much out of breath.

It was now my turn. I grasped the first rung and began to descend. I did not count the number of the rungs; there were certainly seven or eight of them; I felt the ladder stretching under my weight and swaying about.

The guides shouted to me to go slowly, and shortly afterwards that I had gone far enough. They meant that I had reached the point desired and that I might come back. However, I insisted on descending five or six more of the rungs, then I put my foot on a ledge of rock, but I did not let go the ladder with my hands. This was how I took possession. The guides up above were calling to me to make haste, so I climbed up the swaying rope and was soon by their side again. The ceremony was over.

And thus, in dismal mist, amidst the howling of the wind and the rumbling of thunder, the last great secret of the Matterhorn was revealed to man.

Now it behoved us to flee from the mountain's vengeance, so we packed up our baggage, but left our ladder hanging where it was as a witness to what we had done, and for the benefit of the Schwarzsee telescope.

The second ladder, which we had not used, we took to pieces, and carried off the rope with us, but threw the wood into the air, and saw it disappear into the unfathomed mist.

We hastened back to the summit, and it was high time, for the clouds were condensing and discharging an icy sleet, which the wind blew with violence into our faces. Nevertheless, on the top we consumed the last of our provisions, the clouds meanwhile wrapping us completely about: we could no longer see either precipices at our feet or horizon around us.

Of the sky we saw nothing, of the earth only the little snowy hump on which our feet rested.

We were utterly alone. The other party, which had left the summit more than four hours ago, was without doubt in safety

by now, and, if they thought of us at all, must have thought it likely we had come to grief. It began to hail; we started off quickly down the Swiss side; it was a regular flight. However, below the top, we were sheltered from the wind; a storm of large and gently falling snowflakes replaced the driving sleet, and soon coated the whole Matterhorn with white.

The rope and chains were iced and the rocks were slippery; our hands were numb and bruised, but now we neither felt fatigue nor perceived difficulties. One thought urged us onwards: that of reaching the Jomein the same evening.

Two hours after leaving the top we passed the old hut; at six we descended on to the Furggen glacier without going near the Hörnli hut, and we reached the Breuiljoch at seven. Thence we saw on the Italian side, amid that sea of stormy clouds, far away, in the direction of Aosta, the gleam of a gloomy sunset, which cast a strange, violet hue upon the mountains and the atmosphere; the Matterhorn, divided half-way up by a dark veil which added to its mystery, looked divinely tall and stern.

Far below the sound of a bell rang out, and the day drew to its close in an atmosphere of infinite sadness.

My heart was light and joyful; it seemed as if a heavy burden had been removed from me: my great curiosity was satisfied at last. And now, amid that majestic scene, a coarse vision presented itself to my mind: it was that of a clean white table in a warm, well-lighted room, with a steaming dish in front of me and a pleasant smell of cooking all round. And as I walked I thought of some particularly well-cooked toothsome dish that I should order on reaching the hotel.

A bright light appeared quite close to us out of the darkness of the night; we saw before us the door of the hotel, and dark shadows standing out against the light and seeming to await us. And as I passed among those shadows, I fancied I heard one of them express his joy at seeing us return alive, whilst another whispered a word of congratulation which went to my heart.

But I hardly answered the greetings and questions, for it seemed to me now that all I had done in those last few days had been nothing but madness.

The next day, when I reviewed the matter, calm in mind

and rested in body, I had a clear comprehension of what had occurred.

I had been the first to climb, either up or down, the whole Furggen Ridge, and I had, so to speak, taken possession of it; yet I was not satisfied. I felt that I had taken the ancient Matterhorn by surprise, and that such warfare as this was not honourable; that a Cato amongst mountaineers would approve the cause of the vanquished, not that of the victor. All this was borne in upon me by the respect I have for my great adversary; I ought to have overcome him face to face, the first day.

No! the Matterhorn had once more defeated me, not I the Matterhorn.

IV

THE PRICE OF INEXPERIENCE

from

TRUE TALES OF MOUNTAIN ADVENTURE¹

by MRS. AUBREY LE BLOND

The Matterhorn, like other mountains in the Alps once thought to be inaccessible, soon became the happy hunting-ground of mountaineers inadequately experienced to meet the mountains in all conditions. Given good weather and all is well; should the weather change lack of experience coupled with inadequate reserves of physical strength can well spell catastrophe. This typical tragedy which was taken from the "Alpine Journal" and "The Pall Mall Gazette" is contained in Mrs. Le Blond's anthology and may also be read in another version in Charles Gos's "Alpine Tragedy," published by Allen and Unwin, 1948. It is included here not as an example of the greatness of men but as evidence of the supreme penalties which mountains have demanded of those who fail to treat them with due respect.



By the summer of 1886 it had become common for totally inexperienced persons with incompetent guides (for no first-rate guide would undertake such a task) to make the ascent of the Matterhorn. In fine settled weather they contrived to get safely up and down the mountain. But like all high peaks the Matterhorn is subject to sudden atmospheric changes, and a high wind or falling snow will in an hour or less change the whole character of the work and make the descent one of extreme difficulty even for experienced mountaineers. Practically unused to Alpine climbing, thinly clothed, and accompanied by young guides of third-rate ability, what wonder is it that when caught in a storm, a member of the party, whose expedition is described below, perished?

The editor of the *Alpine Journal* writes: "On the morning of August 17th last, four parties of travellers left the lower hut on the mountain and attained the summit. One of them, that of Mr. Mercer, reached Zermatt the same night. The three others

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were much delayed by a sudden storm which came on during the descent. Two Dutch gentlemen, led by Moser and Peter Taugwald, regained the lower hut at an advanced hour of the night; but Monsieur A. de Falkner and his son (with J. P. and Daniel Maquignaz, and Angelo Ferrari, of Pinzolo), and Messrs. John Davies and Frederick Charles Borckhardt (with Fridolin Kronig and Peter Aufdemblatten), were forced to spend the night out; the latter party, indeed, spent part of the next day (August 18th) out as well, and Mr. Borckhardt unfortunately succumbed to the exposure in the afternoon. He was the youngest son of the late vicar of Lydden, and forty-eight years of age. Neither he nor Mr. Davies was a member of the Alpine Club."

The Pall Mall Gazette published on August 24th the account given by Mr. Davies to an interviewer. It is as follows, and the inexperience of the climbers is made clear in every line :

"We left Zermatt about 2 o'clock on Monday afternoon in capital spirits. The weather was lovely, and everything promised a favourable ascent. We had two guides whose names were on the official list, whose references were satisfactory, and who were twice over recommended to us by Herr Seiler, whose advice we sought before we engaged them, and who gave them excellent credentials. We placed ourselves in their hands, as is the rule in such cases, ordered the provisions and wine which they declared to be necessary, and made ready for the ascent. I had lived among hills from my boyhood. I had some experience of mountaineering in the Pyrenees, where I ascended the highest and other peaks. In the Engadine I have also done some climbing; and last week, together with Mr. Borckhardt, who was one of my oldest friends, I made the ascent of the Titlis, and made other excursions among the hills. Mr. Borckhardt was slightly my senior, but as a walker he was quite equal to me in endurance. When we arrived at Zermatt last Saturday we found that parties were going up the Matterhorn on Monday. We knew that ladies had made the ascent, and youths; and the mountain besides had been climbed by friends of ours whose physical strength, to say the least, was not superior to ours. It was a regular thing to go up the Matterhorn, and we accordingly determined to make the ascent.

"We started next morning at half-past two or three. We were the third party to leave the cabin, but, making good speed over the first stage of the ascent, we reached the second when the others were breakfasting there, and then resumed the climb. Mr. Mercer, with his party, followed by the Dutch party, started shortly before us. We met them about a quarter-past eight returning from the top. They said that they had been there half an hour, and that there was no view. We passed them, followed by the Italians, and reached the summit about a quarter to nine. The ascent, though toilsome, had not exhausted us in the least. Both Mr. Borckhardt and myself were quite fresh, although we had made the summit before the Italians, who started together with us from the second hut. Had the weather remained favourable, we could have made the descent with ease.*

"Even while we were on the summit I felt hail begin to fall, and before we were five minutes on our way down it was hailing heavily. It was a fine hail, and inches of it fell in a very short time, and the track was obliterated. We pressed steadily downwards, followed by the Italians, nor did it occur to me at that time that there was any danger. We got past the ropes and chains safely, and reached the snowy slope on the shoulder. At this point we were leading. But as the Italians had three guides, and we only two, we changed places, so that their third guide could lead. They climbed down the slope, cutting steps for their feet in the ice. We trod closely after the Italians, but the snow and hail filled up the holes so rapidly that, in order to make a safe descent, our guides had to recut the steps. This took much time—as much as two hours I should say—and every hour the snow was getting deeper. At last we got down the snow-slope on to the steep rocks below. The Italians were still in front of us, and we all kept on steadily descending. We were still in good spirits, nor did we feel any doubt that we should reach the bottom. Our first alarm was occasioned by the Italians losing their way. They found their progress barred by precipitous rocks, and their guides came back to ours to consult as to the road. Our guides insisted

* Here the whole contention that the party was a competent one falls to the ground. No one without a reserve of strength and skill to meet possible bad weather should embark on an important ascent. Fair-weather guides and climbers should keep to easy excursions.

that the path lay down the side of a steep couloir. Their guides demurred; but after going down some ten feet, they cried out that our guides were right, and they went on—we followed. By this time it was getting dark. The hail continued increasing. We began to get alarmed. It seemed impossible to make our way to the cabin that night. We had turned to the right after leaving the couloir, crossed some slippery rocks, and after a short descent turned to the left and came to the edge of the precipice where Mosely fell, where there was some very slight shelter afforded by an overhanging rock, and there we prepared to pass the night, seeing that all further progress was hopeless. We were covered with ice. The night was dark. The air was filled with hail. We were too cold to eat. The Italians were about an hour below us on the mountain side. We could hear their voices and exchanged shouts. Excepting them, we were thousands of feet above any other human being. I found that while Borckhardt had emptied his brandy-flask, mine was full. I gave him half of mine. That lasted us through the night. We did not try the wine till the morning, and then we found that it was frozen solid.

“Never have I had a more awful experience than that desolate night on the Matterhorn. We were chilled to the bone, and too exhausted to stand. The wind rose, and each gust drove the hail into our faces, cutting us like a knife. Our guides did everything that man could do to save us. Aufdemblatten did his best to make us believe that there was no danger. ‘Only keep yourselves warm; keep moving; and we shall go down all right tomorrow, when the sun rises.’ ‘It is of no use,’ I replied; ‘we shall die here!’ They chafed our limbs, and did their best to make us stand up; but it was in vain. I felt angry at their interference. Why could they not leave us alone to die? I remember striking wildly but feebly at my guide as he insisted on rubbing me. Every movement gave me such agony, I was racked with pain, especially in my back and loins—pain so intense as to make me cry out. The guides had fastened the rope round the rock to hold on by, while they jumped to keep up the circulation of the blood. They brought us to it, and made us jump twice or thrice. Move we could not; we lay back prostrate on the snow and ice, while the guides varied their jumping by rubbing our limbs and endeavouring to make us move our arms and legs. They

were getting feebler and feebler. Borckhardt and I, as soon as we were fully convinced that death was imminent for us, did our best to persuade our guides to leave us where we lay and make their way down the hill. They were married men with families. To save us was impossible; they might at least save themselves. We begged them to consider their wives and children and to go. This was at the beginning of the night. They refused. They would rather die with us, they said; they would remain and do their best.

"Borckhardt and I talked a little as men might do who are at the point of death. He bore without complaining pain that made me cry out from time to time. We both left directions with the guides that we were to be buried at Zermatt. Borckhardt spoke of his friends and his family affairs, facing his death with manly resignation and composure. As the night wore on I became weaker and weaker. I could not even make the effort necessary to flick the snow off my companion's face. By degrees the guides began to lose hope. The cold was so intense, we crouched together for warmth. They lay beside us to try and impart some heat. It was in vain. 'We shall die!' 'We are lost!' 'Yes,' said Aufdemblatten, 'very likely we shall.' He was so weak, poor fellow, he could hardly keep his feet; but still he tried to keep me moving. It was a relief not to be touched. I longed for death, but death would not come.

"Towards half-past two on Wednesday morning—so we reckoned, for all our watches had stopped with the cold—the snow ceased, and the air became clear. It had been snowing or hailing without intermission for eighteen hours. It was very dark below, but above all was clear, although the wind still blew. When the sun rose, we saw just a gleam of light. Then a dark cloud came from the hollow below, and our hopes went out. 'Oh, if only the sun would come out!' we said to each other, I do not know how many times. But it did not, and instead of the sun came the snow once more. Towards seven, as near as I can make it, a desperate attempt was made to get us to walk. The guides took Borckhardt, and between them propped him on his feet and made him stagger on a few steps. They failed to keep him moving more than a step or two. The moment they let go he dropped. They repeated the same with me. Neither could I

stand. I remember four distinct times they drove us forward, only to see us drop helpless after each step. It was evidently no use. Borckhardt had joined again with me in repeatedly urging the guides to leave us and to save themselves. They had refused, and continued to do all that their failing strength allowed to protect us from the bitter cold. As the morning wore on, my friend, who during the night had been much more composed and tranquil than I, began to grow perceptibly weaker. We were quite resigned to die, and had, in fact, lost all hope. We had been on the mountain from about 3 a.m. on Tuesday to 1 p.m. on Wednesday—thirty-four hours in all. Eighteen of these were spent in a blinding snowstorm, and we had hardly tasted food since we left the summit at nine on the Tuesday morning. At length (about one) we heard shouts far down the mountain. The guides said they probably proceeded from a search party sent out to save us. I again urged the guides to go down by themselves to meet the searchers, and to hurry them up. This they refused to do unless I accompanied them. Borckhardt was at this time too much exhausted to stand upright, and was lying in a helpless condition. The guides, although completely worn out, wished to attempt the descent with me, and they considered that by so doing we should be able to indicate to the searchers the precise spot where my friend lay, and to hasten their efforts to reach him with stimulants. Since early morning the snow had ceased falling. We began the descent, and at first I required much assistance from the guides, but by degrees became better able to move, and the hope of soon procuring help from the approaching party for my poor friend sustained us. After a most laborious descent of about an hour and a half, we reached the first members of the rescue party, and directed them to where Borckhardt lay, requesting them to proceed there with all haste, and, after giving him stimulants, to bring him down to the lower hut in whatever condition they found him. We went on to the hut to await his arrival, meeting on the way Mr. King, of the English Alpine Club, with his guides, who were hurrying up with warm clothing. A few hours later we heard the terrible news that the relief party had found him dead."

V

EVEREST 1922: THE THIRD ATTEMPT

from

THE ASSAULT ON MOUNT EVEREST 1922¹

by BRIGADIER-GENERAL HON. C. G. BRUCE, C.B., M.V.O.,
and other members of the expedition

Everest, the highest point on the earth's surface, rearing itself up majestically in the mighty chain of the snow-clad Himalayas, 29,002 feet above the Tibet-Nepal border, was first seriously attacked by Colonel Howard-Bury and his expedition in 1921. The purpose of this particular expedition was not to climb to the summit but to carry out a complete reconnaissance from every direction to discover what might be the easiest way up. At that stage not even the approaches to the mountain were known. This expedition carried out the work allotted to it with signal success and in 1922 the Mount Everest Committee organised another expedition.

Brigadier-General Bruce was the obvious choice for the leadership in view of his previous Himalayan expedition though on account of his age he was not expected to take part in the actual climbing. The climbing members consisted of Mallory, Finch, Major Norton, Somervell and Dr. Wakefield, a climber as well as a doctor, with Colonel Strutt in charge of the base, Dr. Longstaff as medical officer and naturalist and Captain Noel as photographer. Four other men subsequently joined the party, Crawford, Major Morshead and Captains Bruce and Morris, the two latter as transport officers. Prior to departure there was much discussion as to whether oxygen should be included in the equipment and it was finally decided it should be taken.

Three valiant but unsuccessful attempts were made on the summit, the first reached a height of 26,985 feet without oxygen and in most unfavourable weather, the second attained 27,235 feet using oxygen and the third, which set off on June 7th with the object of reaching the North Col, spending the night there and then on to the summit, met with appalling disaster when the snow cracked without warning, sweeping the whole party down the mountain and killing seven porters.

The account of this dreadful tragedy is from Leigh-Mallory's own contribution to the above book.



THE project of making a third attempt this season was mooted immediately on the return of Finch and Geoffrey Bruce to the

¹ Published by Edward Arnold, London, 1923.

Base Camp. There in hours of idleness we had discussed their prospects and wondered what they would be doing as we gazed at the mountain to make out the weather on the great ridge. We were not surprised to learn when they came down that the summit was still unconquered, and we were not yet prepared to accept defeat. The difficulty was to find a party. Of the six who had been already engaged only one was obviously fit for another great effort. Somervell had shown a recuperative capacity beyond the rest of us. After one day at the Base he had insisted on going up again to Camp III in case he might be of use to the others. The rest were more or less knocked out. Morshead's frost-bitten fingers and toes, from which he was now suffering constant pain, caused grave anxiety of most serious consequences, and the only plan for him was to go down to a lower elevation as soon as possible. Norton's feet had also been affected; he complained at first only of bruises, but the cold had come through the soles of his boots; his trouble too was frost-bite. In any case he could not have come up again, for the strain had told on his heart and he now found himself left without energy or strength.

Geoffrey Bruce's feet also were so badly frost-bitten that he could not walk. Finch, however, was not yet to be counted out. He was evidently very much exhausted, but an examination of his heart revealed no disorder; it was hoped that in five or six days he would be able to start again. My own case was doubtful. Of my frost-bitten finger-tips only one was giving trouble; the extremity above the first joint was black, but the injury was not very deep. Longstaff, who took an interest which we all appreciated in preventing us from doing ourselves permanent injury, pointed out the probability that fingers already touched and highly susceptible to cold would be much more severely injured next time, and was inclined to turn me down, from his medical point of view, on account of my fingers alone. A much more serious matter was the condition of my heart. I felt weak and lazy when it was a question of the least physical exertion, and the heart was found to have a "thrill." Though I was prepared to take risks with my fingers I was prepared to take none with my heart, even had General Bruce allowed me. However, I did not abandon hope. My heart was examined again on June 3rd, no

thrill was heard, and though my pulse was rapid and accelerated quickly with exertion it was capable of satisfactory recovery. We at once arranged that Somervell, Finch and I, together with Wakefield and Crawford, should set forth the same day.

It was already evident that whatever we were to do would now have to wait for the weather. Though the Lama at the Rongbuk Monastery had told us that the monsoon was usually to be expected about June 10th, and we knew that it was late last year, the signs of its approach were gathering every day. Mount Everest could rarely be seen after 9 or 10 a.m. until the clouds cleared away in the evening; and a storm approaching from the West Rongbuk Glacier would generally sweep down the valley in the afternoon. Though we came to despise this blustering phenomenon—for nothing worse came of it than light hail or snow, either at our camp or higher—we should want much fairer days for climbing, and each storm threatened to be the beginning of something far more serious. However, we planned to be on the spot to take any chance that offered. The signs were even more ominous than usual as Finch and I walked up to Camp I on the afternoon of June 3rd; we could hardly feel optimistic; and it was soon apparent that, far from having recovered his strength, my companion was quite unfit for another big expedition. We walked slowly and frequently halted; it was painful to see what efforts it cost him to make any progress. However, he persisted in coming on.

We had not long disposed ourselves comfortably within the four square walls of our "sangar," always a pleasant change from the sloping sides of a tent, when snow began to fall. Released at last by the west wind which had held it back, the monsoon was free to work its will, and we soon understood that the great change of weather had now come. Fine, glistening particles were driven by the wind through the chinks in our walls, to be drifted on the floor or on our coverings where we lay during the night; and as morning grew the snow still fell as thickly as ever. Finch wisely decided to go back, and we charged him with a message to General Bruce, saying that we saw no reason at present to alter our plans. With the whole day to spend confined and inactive we had plenty of time to consider what we ought to do under these conditions. We went over

well-worn arguments once more. It would have been an obvious and easy course, for which no one could reproach us, to have said simply, The monsoon has come; this is the end of the climbing season; it is time to go home. But the case, we felt, was not yet hopeless. The monsoon is too variable and uncertain to be so easily admitted as the final arbiter. There might yet be good prospects ahead of us. It was not unreasonable to expect an interval of fine weather after the first heavy snow, and with eight or ten fair days a third attempt might still be made. In any case, to retire now if the smallest chance remained to us would be an unworthy end to the expedition. We need not run our heads into obvious danger; but rather than be stopped by a general estimate of conditions we would prefer to retire before some definite risk that we were not prepared to take or simply failed to overcome the difficulties.

After a second night of unrelenting snowfall the weather on the morning of June 5th improved and we decided to go on. Low and heavy clouds were still flowing down the East Rongbuk Glacier, but precipitation ceased at an early hour and the sky brightened to the west. It was surprising, after all we had seen of the flakes passing our door, that no great amount of snow was lying on the stones about our camp. But the snow had come on a warm current and melted or evaporated, so that after all the depth was no more than 6 inches at this elevation (17,500 feet). Even on the glacier we went up a long way before noticing a perceptible increase of depth. We passed Camp II, not requiring to halt at this stage, and were well up towards Camp III before the fresh snow became a serious impediment. It was still snowing up here, though not very heavily; there was nothing to cheer the grey scene; the clinging snow about our feet was so wet that even the best of our boots were soaked through, and the last two hours up to Camp III were tiresome enough. Nor was it a cheering camp when we reached it. The tents had been struck for the safety of the poles, but not packed up. We found them now half-full of snow and ice. The stores were all buried; everything that we wanted had first to be dug out.

The snow up here was so much deeper that we anxiously discussed the possibility of going farther. With 15 to 18 inches of snow to contend with, not counting drifts, the labour would be

excessive, and until the snow solidified there would be considerable danger at several points. But the next morning broke fine; we had soon a clear sky and glorious sunshine; it was the warmest day that any of us remembered at Camp III; and as we watched the amazing rapidity with which the snow solidified and the rocks began to appear about our camp, our spirits rose. The side of Everest facing us looked white and cold; but we observed a cloud of snow blown from the North Ridge; it would not be long at this rate before it was fit to climb. We had already resolved to use oxygen on the third attempt. It was improbable that we should beat our own record without it, for the strain of previous efforts would count against us, and we had not the time to improve on our organisation by putting a second camp above the North Col. Somervell, after Finch's explanation of the mechanical details, felt perfectly confident that he could manage the oxygen apparatus, and all those who had used oxygen were convinced that they went up more easily with its help than they could expect to go without it. Somervell and I intended to profit by the experience. They had discovered that the increased combustion in the body required a larger supply of food; we must arrange for a bountiful provision. Their camp at 25,000 feet had been too low; we would try to establish one now, as we had intended before, at 26,000 feet. And we hoped for a further advantage in going higher than Finch and Bruce had done before using oxygen; whereas they had started using it at 21,000 feet, we intended to go up to our old camp at 25,000 feet without it, perhaps use a cylinder each up to 26,000 feet, and at all events start from that height for the summit with a full supply of four cylinders. If this was not the correct policy as laid down by Professor Dryer, it would at least be a valuable experiment.

Our chief anxiety under these new conditions was to provide for the safety of our porters. We hoped that after fixing our fifth camp at 26,000 feet, at the earliest three days hence, on the fourth day of fine weather the porters might be able to go down by themselves to the North Col in easy conditions; to guard against the danger of concealed crevasses there Crawford would meet them at the foot of the North Ridge to conduct them properly roped to Camp IV. As the supply officer at this camp he would also be able to superintend the descent over the first

steep slope of certain porters who would go down from Camp IV without sleeping after carrying up their loads.

But the North Col had first to be reached. With so much new snow to contend with we should hardly get there in one day. If we were to make the most of our chance in the interval of fair weather, we should lose no time in carrying up the loads for some part of the distance. It was decided therefore to begin this work on the following day, June 7th.

In the ascent to the North Col after the recent snowfall we considered that an avalanche was to be feared only in one place, the steep final slope below the shelf. There we could afford to run no risk; we must test the snow and be certain that it was safe before we could cross this slope. Probably we should be obliged to leave our loads below it, having gained, as a result of our day's work, the great advantage of a track. An avalanche might also come down, we thought, on the first steep slope where the ascent began. Here it could do us no harm, and the behaviour of the snow on this slope would be a test of its condition.

The party, Somervell, Crawford and I, with fourteen porters (Wakefield was to be supply officer at Camp III), set out at 8 a.m. In spite of the hard frost of the previous night, the crust was far from bearing our weight; we sank up to our knees in almost every step, and two hours were taken in traversing the snowfield. At 10.15 a.m. Somervell, I, a porter, and Crawford, roped up in that order, began to work up the steep ice-slope, now covered with snow. It was clear that the three of us without loads must take the lead in turns stamping out the tracks for our porters. These men, after their immense efforts on the first and second attempts, had all volunteered to "go high," as they said once more, and everything must be done to ease the terrible work of carrying the loads over the soft snow. No trace was found of our previous tracks, and we were soon arguing as to where exactly they might be as we slanted across the slope. It was remarkable that the snow adhered so well to the ice that we were able to get up without cutting steps. Everything was done by trenching the snow to induce it to come down if it would; every test gave a satisfactory result. Once this crucial place was passed, we plodded on without hesitation. If the snow would not come down where we had formerly encountered

steep bare ice, *a fortiori*, above, on the gentler slopes, we had nothing to fear. The thought of an avalanche was dismissed from our minds.

It was necessarily slow work forging our way through the deep snow, but the party was going extraordinarily well, and the porters were evidently determined to get on. Somervell gave us a long lead, and Crawford next, in spite of the handicap of shorter legs, struggled upwards in some of the worst snow we met until I relieved him. I found the effort at each step so great that no method of breathing I had formerly employed was adequate; it was necessary to pause after each lifting movement for a whole series of breaths, rapid at first and gradually slower, before the weight was transferred again to the other foot. About 1.30 p.m. I halted, and the porters, following on three separate ropes, soon came up with the leading party. We should have been glad to stay where we were for a long rest. But the hour was already late, and as Somervell was ready to take the lead again, we decided to push on. We were now about 400 feet below a conspicuous block of ice and 600 feet below Camp IV, still on the gentle slopes of the corridor. Somervell had advanced only 100 feet, rather up the slope than across it, and the last party of porters had barely begun to move up in the steps. The scene was peculiarly bright and windless, and as we rarely spoke, nothing was to be heard but the laboured panting of our lungs. This stillness was suddenly disturbed. We were startled by an ominous sound, sharp, arresting, violent, and yet somehow soft like an explosion of untamped gunpowder. I had never before on a mountainside heard such a sound; but all of us, I imagine, knew instinctively what it meant, as though we had been accustomed to hear it every day of our lives. In a moment I observed the surface of the snow broken and puckered where it had been even for a few yards to the right of me. I took two steps convulsively in this direction with some quick thought of getting nearer to the edge of the danger that threatened us. And then I began to move slowly downwards, inevitably carried on the whole moving surface by a force I was utterly powerless to resist. Somehow I managed to turn out from the slope so as to avoid being pushed headlong and backwards down it. For a second or two I seemed hardly to be in danger as I went quietly sliding

down with the snow. Then the rope at my waist tightened and held me back. A wave of snow came over me and I was buried. I supposed that the matter was settled. However, I called to mind experiences related by other parties; and it had been suggested that the best chance of escape in this situation lay in swimming. I thrust out my arms above my head and actually went through some sort of motions of swimming on my back. Beneath the surface of the snow, with nothing to inform the senses of the world outside it, I had no impression of speed after the first acceleration—I struggled in the tumbling snow, unconscious of everything else—until, perhaps only a few seconds later, I knew the pace was easing up. I felt an increasing pressure about my body. I wondered how tightly I should be squeezed, and then the avalanche came to rest.

My arms were free; my legs were near the surface. After a brief struggle, I was standing again, surprised and breathless, in the motionless snow. But the rope was tight at my waist; the porter tied on next me, I supposed, must be deeply buried. To my further surprise, he quickly emerged, unharmed as myself. Somervell and Crawford too, though they had been above me by the rope's length, were now quite close, and soon extricated themselves. We subsequently made out that their experiences had been very similar to mine. But where were the rest? Looking down over the foam of snow, we saw one group of porters some little distance, perhaps 150 feet, below us. Presumably the others must be buried somewhere between us and them, and though no sign of these missing men appeared, we at once prepared to find and dig them out. The porters we saw still stood their ground instead of coming up to help. We soon made out that they were the party who had been immediately behind us, and they were pointing below them. They had travelled farther than us in the avalanche, presumably because they were nearer the centre, where it was moving more rapidly. The other two parties, one of four and one of five men roped together, must have been carried even farther. We could still hope that they were safe. But as we hurried down we soon saw that beneath the place where the four porters were standing was a formidable drop; it was only too plain that the missing men had been swept over it. We had no difficulty in finding a way round this obstacle; in a very short time we

were standing under its shadow. The ice-cliff was from 40 to 60 feet high in different places; the crevasse at its foot was more or less filled up with avalanche snow. Our fears were soon confirmed. One man was quickly uncovered and found to be still breathing; before long we were certain that he would live. Another whom we dug out near him had been killed by the fall. He and his party appeared to have struck the hard lower lip of the crevasse, and were lying under the snow on or near the edge of it. The four porters who had escaped soon pulled themselves together after the first shock of the accident, and now worked here with Crawford and did everything they could to extricate the other bodies, while Somervell and I went down into the crevasse. A loop of rope which we pulled up convinced us that the other party must be here. It was slow work loosening the snow with the pick or adze of an ice-axe and shovelling it with the hands. But we were able to follow the rope to the bodies. One was dug up lifeless; another was found upside down, and when we uncovered his face Somervell thought he was still breathing. We had the greatest difficulty in extricating this man, so tightly was the snow packed about his limbs; his load, four oxygen cylinders on a steel frame, had to be cut from his back, and eventually he was dragged out. Though buried for about 40 minutes, he had survived the fall and the suffocation, and suffered no serious harm. Of the two others in this party of four, we found only one. We had at length to give up a hopeless search with the certain knowledge that the first of them to be swept over the cliff, and the most deeply buried, must long ago be dead. Of the other five, all the bodies were recovered, but only one was alive. The two who had so marvellously escaped were able to walk down to Camp III, and were almost perfectly well next day. The other seven were killed.

VI

ASCENT OF THE MATTERHORN AND SUBSEQUENT TRAGEDY

from

THE ASCENT OF THE MATTERHORN¹

by EDWARD WHYMPER

In the 1880s rivalry to become the first to set foot upon the summit of the Matterhorn was intense. Rising to an altitude of 14,782 feet in a stark, immense pyramid on the Swiss-Italian border it had exercised an exaggerated fascination upon climbing men and in the period in question was thought by many to be unclimbable. It was not only the mountaineers that came under its spell but also the peasants on both its borders. To them, if it did not exactly represent the powers of the gods, it was a place of awe and many were the superstitions that they held about it.

The two chief protagonists for the honour of the mountain top were Edward Whymper and Jean-Antoine Carrel. The former firm in the belief that the mountain could be climbed had first pitted his wits against it in 1860 when he was only twenty and for five years he carried out a remorseless attack upon it, including no less than six actual attempts in the years 1861-3. Carrel, a guide of great renown, also shared the same dream as Whymper and his cherished ambition was to be the first to conquer the mountain from the Italian side. As might well be expected there was at first great rivalry between the two men and Carrel would not accompany Whymper, but the two men did subsequently come together but without success to their mission.

In 1865, Whymper determined to try his luck from the Swiss side starting from Zermatt and by a strange set of circumstances Carrel, who should have been attempting the east face with Whymper, was engaged by a well-equipped Italian party to scale the mountain from the south-west.

Whymper's luck changed at the last minute when Lord Francis Douglas and his porter, young Peter Taugwalder, decided to join forces with him. Subsequently Peter's father, a distinguished guide, agreed to accompany them and by a further stroke of fortune there arrived on the scene a famous guide of Whymper's previous attempts, Michel-Auguste Croz, together with the celebrated mountaineer Charles Hudson and his young companion Hadow, all bound for the Matterhorn. Thus a party of seven men set off on July 13th from Zermatt.

¹ Published by John Murray, London, 1880.

In the event Whymper's party won the race by a very narrow margin and were able to look down from the summit at the discomfited Italians still making their way up. The fruits of victory were however but short-lived for the party was overtaken by dire tragedy on the descent when Hadow slipped taking down with him Croz, Hudson and Lord Douglas. Even then all might have been well for the rope connecting the men with their comrades should have held them. Unfortunately it broke and the four men were plunged 4,000 feet below on to the Matterhorn Gletscher.

The following story begins at a point 11,000 feet up with the party making ready for the summit trip and concludes with the survivors of the tragic descent arrived at a place of safety.



WE assembled together outside the tent before dawn on the morning of July 14th, and started directly it was light enough to move. Young Peter came on with us as a guide, and his brother returned to Zermatt.* We followed the route which had been taken on the previous day, and in a few minutes turned the rib which had intercepted the view of the eastern face from our tent platform. The whole of this great slope was now revealed, rising for 3,000 feet like a huge natural staircase. Some parts were more, and others were less, easy; but we were not once brought to a halt by any serious impediment, for when an obstruction was met in front it could always be turned to the right or to the left. For the greater part of the way there was, indeed, no occasion for the rope, and sometimes Hudson led, sometimes myself. At 6.20 we had attained a height of 12,800 feet, and halted for half an hour; we then continued the ascent without a break until 9.55, when we stopped for 50 minutes, at a height of 14,000 feet. Twice we struck the N.E. ridge, and followed it for some little distance—to no advantage, for it was usually more rotten and steep, and always more difficult, than the face.† Still, we kept near to it, lest stones perchance might fall.‡

* It was originally intended to leave both the young men behind. We found it difficult to divide the food, and so the new arrangement was made.

† There is very little to choose between in the arêtes leading from the summit towards the Hörnli (N.E. ridge) and towards the Col du Lion (S.W. ridge). Both are jagged, serrated ridges, which any experienced climber

We had now arrived at the foot of that part which, from the Riffelberg or from Zermatt, seems perpendicular or overhanging, and could no longer continue upon the eastern side. For a little distance we ascended by snow upon the arête—that is, the ridge—descending towards Zermatt, and then, by common consent, turned over to the right, or to the northern side. Before doing so, we made a change in the order of ascent. Croz went first, I followed, Hudson came third; Hadow and old Peter were last. “Now,” said Croz, as he led off, “now for something altogether different.” The work became difficult, and required caution. In some places there was little to hold, and it was desirable that those should be in front who were least likely to slip. The general slope of the mountain at this part was *less* than 40° , and snow had accumulated in, and had filled up, the interstices of the rock-face, leaving only occasional fragments projecting here and there. These were at times covered with a thin film of ice, produced from the melting and refreezing of the snow. It was the counterpart, on a small scale, of the upper 700 feet of the *Pointe des Ecrins*—only there was this material difference; the face of the *Ecrins* was about, or exceeded, an angle of 50° , and the *Matterhorn* face was less than 40° .* It was a place over which any fair mountaineer might pass in safety, and

would willingly avoid if he could find another route. On the northern (Zermatt) side the eastern face affords another route, or any number of routes, since there is hardly a part of it which cannot be traversed! On the southern (Breil) side the ridge alone, generally speaking, can be followed, and when it becomes impracticable, and the climber is forced to bear down to the right or to the left, the work is of the most difficult character.

‡ Very few stones fell during the two days I was on the mountain, and none came near us. Others who have followed the same route have not been so fortunate; they may not, perhaps, have taken the same precautions. It is a noteworthy fact that the lateral moraine of the left bank of the *Furggengletscher* is scarcely larger than that of the right bank, although the former receives all the debris that falls from the 4,000 feet of cliffs which form the eastern side of the *Matterhorn*, whilst the latter is fed by perfectly insignificant slopes. Neither of these moraines is large. This is strong evidence that stones do *not* fall to any great extent from the eastern face. The inward dip of the beds retains the detritus in place. Hence the eastern face appears, when one is upon it, to be undergoing more rapid disintegration than the other sides; in reality, the mantle of ruin spares the mountain from further waste. Upon the southern side, rocks fall as they are rent off; “each day’s work is cleared away” every day; and hence the faces and ridges are left naked, and are exposed to fresh attacks.

* This part was less steeply inclined than the whole of the eastern face.

Mr. Hudson ascended this part, and, as far as I know, the entire mountain, without having the slightest assistance rendered to him upon any occasion. Sometimes, after I had taken a hand from Croz, or received a pull, I turned to offer the same to Hudson; but he invariably declined, saying it was not necessary. Mr. Hadow, however, was not accustomed to this kind of work, and required continual assistance. It is only fair to say that the difficulty which he found at this part arose simply and entirely from want of experience.

This solitary difficult part was of no great extent.* We bore away over it at first, nearly horizontally, for a distance of about 400 feet; then ascended directly towards the summit for about 60 feet; and then doubled back to the ridge which descends towards Zermatt. A long stride round a rather awkward corner brought us to snow once more. The last doubt vanished! The Matterhorn was ours! Nothing but 200 feet of easy snow remained to be surmounted!

You must now carry your thoughts back to the seven Italians who started from Breil on the 11th of July. Four days had passed since their departure, and we were tormented with anxiety lest they should arrive on the top before us. All the way up we had talked of them, and many false alarms of "men on the summit" had been raised. The higher we rose, the more intense became the excitement. What if we should be beaten at the last moment? The slope eased off, at length we could be detached, and Croz and I, dashing away, ran a neck-and-neck race, which ended in a dead heat. At 1.40 p.m. the world was at our feet, and the Matterhorn was conquered. Hurrah! Not a footstep could be seen.

It was not yet certain that we had not been beaten. The summit of the Matterhorn was formed of a rudely level ridge, about 350 feet long,† and the Italians might have been at its

* I have no memorandum of the time that it occupied. It must have taken about an hour and a half.

† The highest points are towards the two ends. In 1865 the northern end was slightly higher than the southern one. In bygone years Carrel and I often suggested to each other that we might one day arrive upon the top, and find ourselves cut off from the very highest point by a notch in the summit-ridge which is seen from the Theodule and from Breil. This notch is very conspicuous from below, but when we were upon the summit it was hardly noticed, and it could be passed without the least difficulty.

farther extremity. I hastened to the southern end, scanning the snow right and left eagerly. Hurrah! again; it was untrodden. "Where were the men?" I peered over the cliff, half doubting, half expectant. I saw them immediately—mere dots on the ridge, at an immense distance below. Up went my arms and my hat. "Croze! Croze! come here!" "Where are they, Monsieur?" "There, don't you see them, down there?" "Ah! the *coquins*, they are low down." "Croze, we must make those fellows hear us." We yelled until we were hoarse. The Italians seemed to regard us—we could not be certain. "Croze, we *must* make them hear us; they *shall* hear us!" I seized a block of rock and hurled it down, and called upon my companion, in the name of friendship, to do the same. We drove our sticks in, and prised away the crags, and soon a torrent of stones poured down the cliffs. There was no mistake about it this time. The Italians turned and fled.*

Still, I would that the leader of that party could have stood with us at that moment, for our victorious shouts conveyed to him the disappointment of the ambition of a lifetime. He was *the* man, of all those who attempted the ascent of the Matterhorn, who most deserved to be the first upon its summit. He was the first to doubt its inaccessibility, and he was the only man who persisted in believing that its ascent would be accomplished. It was the aim of his life to make the ascent from the side of Italy, for the honour of his native valley. For a time he had the game in his hands: he played it as he thought best; but he made a false move, and he lost it. Times have changed with Carrel. His supremacy is questioned in the Val Tournanche; new men have arisen; and he is no longer recognised as *the* chasseur above all others: though so long as he remains the man that he is today, it will not be easy to find his superior.

The others had arrived, so we went back to the northern end of the ridge. Croze now took the tent-pole,† and planted it in the

* I have learnt since from J.-A. Carrel that they heard our first cries. They were then upon the south-west ridge, close to the "Gravate," and *twelve hundred and fifty feet* below us; or, as the crow flies, at a distance of about one-third of a mile.

† At our departure the men were confident that the ascent would be made, and took one of the poles out of the tent. I protested that it was tempting Providence; they took the pole, nevertheless.

highest snow. "Yes," we said, "there is the flag-staff, but where is the flag?" "Here it is," he answered, pulling off his blouse and fixing it to the stick. It made a poor flag, and there was no wind to float it out, yet it was seen all around. They saw it at Zermatt—at the Riffel—in the Val Tournanche. At Breil, the watchers cried, "Victory is ours!" They raised 'bravos' for Carrel, and 'vivas' for Italy, and hastened to put themselves *en fête*. On the morrow they were undeceived. "All was changed; the explorers returned sad — cast down — disheartened — confounded — gloomy." "It is true," said the men. "We saw them ourselves—they hurled stones at us! The old traditions *are* true—there are spirits on the top of the Matterhorn!"*

We returned to the southern end of the ridge to build a cairn, and then paid homage to the view.† The day was one of those superlatively calm and clear ones which usually precede bad

* Signor Giordano was naturally disappointed at the result, and wished the men to start again. *They all refused to do so, with the exception of Jean-Antoine.* Upon the 16th of July he set out again with three others, and upon the 17th gained the summit by passing (at first) up the south-west ridge, and (afterwards) by turning over to the Z'Mutt, or north-western side. On the 18th he returned to Breil.

Whilst we were upon the southern end of the summit-ridge, we paid some attention to the portion of the mountain which intervened between ourselves and the Italian guides. It seemed as if there would not be the least chance for them if they should attempt to storm the final peak directly from the end of the 'shoulder.' In that direction cliffs fell sheer down from the summit, and we were unable to see beyond a certain distance. There remained the route about which Carrel and I had often talked, namely to ascend directly at first from the end of the 'shoulder,' and afterwards to swerve to the left—that is, to the Z'Mutt side—and to complete the ascent from the north-west. When we were upon the summit we laughed at this idea. The part of the mountain that I have described was not easy, although its inclination was moderate. If that slope was made only ten degrees steeper, its difficulty would be enormously increased. To double its inclination would be to make it impracticable. The slope at the southern end of the summit-ridge, falling towards the north-west, was *much* steeper than that over which we passed, and we ridiculed the idea that any person should attempt to ascend in that direction, when the northern route was so easy. Nevertheless, the summit was reached by that route by the undaunted Carrel. From knowing the final slope over which he passed, and from the account of Mr. F. C. Grove—who is the only traveller by whom it has been traversed—I do not hesitate to term the ascent of Carrel and Bich in 1865 the most desperate piece of mountain-scrambling upon record. In 1869 I asked Carrel if he had ever done anything more difficult. His reply was, "Man cannot do anything much more difficult than that!"

† The summit-ridge was much shattered, although not so extensively as the south-west and north-east ridges. The highest rock, in 1865, was a block of mica schist, and the fragment I broke off it not only possesses, in a remarkable degree, the *character* of the peak, but mimics, in an astonishing manner, the details of the form.

weather. The atmosphere was perfectly still, and free from all clouds or vapours. Mountains fifty—nay a hundred—miles off looked sharp and near. All their details—ridge and crag, snow and glacier—stood out with faultless definition. Pleasant thoughts of happy days in bygone years came up unbidden, as we recognised the old, familiar forms. All were revealed—not one of the principal peaks of the Alps was hidden.* I see them clearly now—the great inner circles of giants, backed by the ranges, chains and *massifs*. First came the Dent Blanche, hoary and grand; the Gabelhorn and pointed Rothhorn; and then the peerless Weisshorn: the towering Mischalbelhörner, flanked by the Allaleinhorn, Strahlhorn and Rimpfischhorn; then Monte Rosa—with its many Spitzes—the Lyskamm and the Breithorn. Behind was the Bernese Oberland governed by the Finsteraarhorn, and then the Simplon and St. Gothard groups; the Disgrazia and the Orteler. Towards the south we looked down to Chivasso on the plain of Piedmont, and far beyond. The Viso—one hundred miles away—seemed close upon us; the Maritime Alps—one hundred and thirty miles distant—were free from haze. Then came my first love—the Pelvoux; the Ecrins and the Meije; the clusters of the Graians; and lastly, in the west, gorgeous in the full sunlight, rose the monarch of all—Mont Blanc. Ten thousand feet beneath us were the green fields of Zermatt, dotted with chalets, from which blue smoke rose lazily. Eight thousand feet below, on the other side, were the pastures of Breil. There were black and gloomy forests, bright and cheerful meadows; bounding waterfalls and tranquil lakes; fertile lands and savage wastes; sunny plains and frigid plateaux. There were the most rugged forms, and the most graceful outlines—bold, perpendicular cliffs, and gentle, undulating slopes; rocky mountains and snowy mountains, sombre and solemn, or glittering and white, with walls—turrets—pinnacles—pyramids—domes—cones—and spires! There was every combination that the world can give, and every contrast that the heart could desire.

We remained on the summit for one hour:

“One crowded hour of glorious life.”

* It is most unusual to see the southern half of the panorama unclouded. A hundred ascents may be made before this will be the case again.

It passed away too quickly, and we began to prepare for the descent.

Hudson and I again consulted as to the best and safest arrangement of the party. We agreed that it would be best for Croz to go first,* and Hadow second; Hudson, who was almost equal to a guide in sureness of foot, wished to be third; Lord F. Douglas was placed next, and old Peter, the strongest of the remainder, after him. I suggested to Hudson that we should attach a rope to the rocks on our arrival at the difficult bit, and hold it as we descended, as an additional protection. He approved the idea, but it was not definitely settled that it should be done. The party was being arranged in the above order whilst I was sketching the summit, and they had finished, and were waiting for me to be tied in line, when someone remembered that our names had not been left in a bottle. They requested me to write them down, and moved off while it was being done.

A few minutes afterwards I tied myself to young Peter, ran down after the others, and caught them just as they were commencing the descent of the difficult part. Great care was being taken. Only one man was moving at a time; when he was firmly planted the next advanced, and so on. They had not, however, attached the additional rope to rocks, and nothing was said about it. The suggestion was not made for my own sake, and I am not sure that it even occurred to me again. For some little distance we two followed the others, detached from them, and should have continued so had not Lord F. Douglas asked me, about 3 p.m., to tie on to old Peter, as he feared, he said, that Taugwalder would not be able to hold his ground if a slip occurred.

A few minutes later, a sharp-eyed lad ran into the Monte Rosa hotel, to Seiler, saying that he had seen an avalanche fall from the summit of the Matterhorn on to the Matterhorn gletscher. The boy was reproved for telling idle stories; he was right, nevertheless, and this was what he saw.

Michel Croz had laid aside his axe, and in order to give Mr. Hadow greater security, was absolutely taking hold of his legs,

* If the members of the party had been more equally efficient, Croz would have been placed last.

and putting his feet, one by one, into their proper positions.* As far as I know, no one was actually descending. I cannot speak with certainty, because the two leading men were partially hidden from my sight by an intervening mass of rock, but it is my belief, from the movements of their shoulders, that Croz, having done as I have said, was in the act of turning round to go down a step or two himself; at this moment Mr. Hadow slipped, fell against him, and knocked him over. I heard one startled exclamation from Croz, then saw him and Mr. Hadow flying downwards; in another moment Hudson was dragged from his steps, and Lord F. Douglas immediately after him.† All this was the work of a moment. Immediately we heard Croz's exclamation, old Peter and I planted ourselves as firmly as the rocks would permit:‡ the rope was taut between us, and the jerk came on us both as on one man. We held; but the rope broke midway between Taugwalder and Lord Francis Douglas. For

* Not at all an unusual proceeding, even between born mountaineers. I wish to convey the impression that Croz was using all pains, rather than to indicate extreme inability on the part of Mr. Hadow. The insertion of the word "absolutely" makes the passage, perhaps, rather ambiguous. I retain it now, in order to offer the above explanation.

† At the moment of the accident, Croz, Hadow and Hudson were all close together. Between Hudson and Lord F. Douglas the rope was all but taut, and the same between all the others, who were *above*. Croz was standing by the side of a rock which afforded good hold, and if he had been aware, or had suspected, that anything was about to occur, he might and would have gripped it, and would have prevented any mischief. He was taken totally by surprise. Mr. Hadow slipped off his feet on to his back, his feet struck Croz in the small of the back, and knocked him over, head first. Croz's axe was out of his reach, yet without it he managed to get his head uppermost before he disappeared from our sight. If it had been in his hand I have no doubt that he would have stopped himself and Mr. Hadow.

Mr. Hadow, at the moment of his slip, was not occupying a bad position. He could have moved either up or down, and could touch with his hand the rock of which I have spoken. Hudson was not so well placed, but he had liberty of motion. The rope was not taut from him to Hadow, and the two men fell ten or twelve feet before the jerk came upon him. Lord F. Douglas was not favourably placed, and could neither move up nor down. Old Peter was firmly planted, and stood just beneath a large rock which he hugged with both arms. I enter into these details to make it more apparent that the position occupied by the party at the moment of the accident was not by any means excessively trying. We were compelled to pass over the exact spot where the slip occurred, and we found—even with shaken nerves—that it was not a difficult place to pass. I have described the *slope generally* as difficult, and it is so undoubtedly to most persons; but it must be distinctly understood that Mr. Hadow slipped at an easy part.

‡ Or more correctly, we held on as tightly as possible. There was no time to change our position.

a few seconds we saw our unfortunate companions sliding downwards on their backs, and spreading out their hands, endeavouring to save themselves. They passed from our sight uninjured, disappeared one by one, and fell from precipice to precipice on to the Matterhornletscher below, a distance of nearly 4,000 feet in height. From the moment the rope broke it was impossible to help them.

So perished our comrades! For the space of half an hour we remained on the spot without moving a single step. The two men, paralysed by terror, cried like infants, and trembled in such a manner as to threaten us with the fate of the others. Old Peter rent the air with exclamations of "Chamounix! Oh, what will Chamounix say?" He meant, Who would believe that Croz could fall? The young man did nothing but scream or sob, "We are lost! we are lost!" Fixed between the two, I could neither move up nor down. I begged young Peter to descend, but he dared not. Unless he did, we could not advance. Old Peter became alive to the danger, and swelled the cry, "We are lost! we are lost!" The father's fear was natural—he trembled for his son; the young man's fear was cowardly—he thought of self alone. At last old Peter summoned up courage, and changed his position to a rock to which he could fix the rope; the young man then descended, and we all stood together. Immediately we did so, I asked for the rope which had given way, and found, to my surprise—indeed, to my horror—that it was the weakest of the three ropes. It was not brought, and should not have been employed, for the purpose for which it was used. It was old rope, and, compared with the others, was feeble. It was intended as a reserve, in case we had to leave much rope behind, attached to rocks. I saw at once that a serious question was involved, and made him give me the end. It had broken in mid-air, and it did not appear to have sustained previous injury.

For more than two hours afterwards I thought almost every moment that the next would be my last; for the Taugwalders, utterly unnerved, were not only incapable of giving assistance, but were in such a state that a slip might have been expected from them at any moment. After a time we were able to do that which should have been done at first, and fixed ropes to firm rocks, in addition to being tied together. These ropes

were cut from time to time, and were left behind. [†] Even with this assurance the men were sometimes afraid to proceed, and several times old Peter turned with ashy face and faltering limbs, and said, with terrible emphasis, "*I cannot!*"

About 6 p.m. we arrived at the snow upon the ridge descending towards Zermatt, and all peril was over.

* Those ends, I believe, are still attached to the rocks, and mark our line of ascent and descent. I saw one of them in 1873

VII

DEATH OF BENNEN

from

SCRAMBLES AMONGST THE ALPS IN THE YEARS
1860-69¹

by EDWARD WHYMPER

Johann Josef Bennen was a celebrated Alpine guide born in the Haut-Valais in 1819, who accompanied Tyndall on many of his climbs including his conquest of the Weisshorn and his attempts upon the Matterhorn. To employ the description of Tyndall's companion, F. Vaughan Hawkins, "Bennen . . . surpasses all the rest (of the famous guides) in the qualities which fit a man for a leader in hazardous expeditions, combining boldness and prudence with an ease and power peculiar to himself, so he has a faculty of conceiving and planning his achievements, a way of concentrating his mind upon an idea, and working out his idea with clearness and precision, which I never observed in any man of the kind, and which makes him in his way a sort of Garibaldi."

On February 28th, 1864, he set off from Sion in company with Mr. Gosset and M. Boissonnet to climb the Haut de Cry in company with three local guides. The going was very hard owing to the depth of snow into which the men kept sinking but they eventually reached firmer conditions at the base of the summit-peak. Soon, however, conditions worsened and the party were ploughing waist-deep through the snow. Suddenly the snow split wide apart in front of them and after a momentary pause an avalanche descended upon the men engulfing the whole party. Scarcely had the avalanche halted than the snow started to freeze and imprison them. The three local men were able to free themselves and rescue Gosset but Bennen and Boissonnet remained fast in the snow until their bodies were subsequently retrieved by a rescue party some days later.

This account is taken from an appendix to the above book and was written by Mr. Philip C. Gosset for the "Alpine Journal." It is also included in Tyndall's "Hours of Exercise in the Alps."



"We had to go up a steep snow-field, about 800 feet high, as well as I remember. It was about 150 feet broad at the top, and 400 or 500 at the bottom. It was a sort of couloir on a large scale. During the ascent we sank about one foot deep at every

¹Published by John Murray, London, 1871.

step. Bennen did not seem to like the look of the snow very much. He asked the local guides whether avalanches ever came down this couloir, to which they answered that our position was perfectly safe. We had mounted on the northern side of the couloir, and having arrived at 150 feet from the top, we began crossing it on a horizontal curve, so as to gain to E. arête. The inflexion or dip of the couloir was slight, not above 25 feet, the inclination near 35° . We were walking in the following order: Bevard, Nance, Bennen, myself, B., and Rebot. Having crossed over about three-quarters of the breadth of the couloir, the two leading men suddenly sank considerably above their waists. Bennen tightened the rope. The snow was too deep to think of getting out of the hole they had made, so they advanced one or two steps, dividing the snow with their bodies. Bennen turned round and told us he was afraid of starting an avalanche; we asked whether it would not be better to return and cross the couloir higher up. To this the three Ardon men opposed themselves; they mistook the proposed precaution for fear, and the two leading men continued their work. After three or four steps gained in the aforesaid manner, the snow became hard again. Bennen had not moved—he was evidently undecided what he should do; as soon, however, as he saw hard snow again, he advanced and crossed parallel to, but above, the furrow the Ardon men had made. Strange to say, the snow supported him. While he was passing I observed that the leader, Bevard, had ten or twelve feet of rope coiled round his shoulder. I of course at once told him to uncoil it and get on the arête, from which he was not more than fifteen feet distant. Bennen then told me to follow. I tried his steps, but sank up to my waist in the very first. So I went through the furrows, holding my elbows close to my body, so as not to touch the sides. This furrow was about twelve feet long, and as the snow was good on the other side, we had all come to the false conclusion that the snow was accidentally softer there than elsewhere. Bennen advanced; he had made but a few steps when we heard a deep, cutting sound. The snow-field split in two about fourteen or fifteen feet above us. The cleft was at first quite narrow, not more than an inch broad. An awful silence ensued; it lasted but a few seconds, and then it was broken by Bennen's voice, 'We are all lost.' His words were slow and

solemn, and those who knew him felt what they really meant when spoken by such a man as Bennen. They were his last words. I drove my alpenstock into the snow, and brought the weight of my body to bear on it. I then waited. It was an awful moment of suspense. I turned my head towards Bennen to see whether he had done the same thing. To my astonishment I saw him turn round, face the valley, and stretch out both arms. The snow on which we stood began to move slowly, and I felt the utter uselessness of any alpenstock. I soon sank up to my shoulders, and began descending backwards. From this moment I saw nothing of what had happened to the rest of the party. With a good deal of trouble I succeeded in turning round. The speed of the avalanche increased rapidly, and before long I was covered up with snow. I was suffocating when I suddenly came to the surface again. I was on a wave of the avalanche, and saw it before me as I was carried down. It was the most awful sight I ever saw. The head of the avalanche was already at the spot where we had made our last halt. The head alone was preceded by a thick cloud of snow-dust; the rest of the avalanche was clear. Around me I heard the horrid hissing of the snow, and far before me the thundering of the foremost part of the avalanche. To prevent myself sinking again, I made use of my arms much in the same way as when swimming in a standing position. At last I noticed that I was moving slower; then I saw the pieces of snow in front of me stop at some yards' distance; then the snow straight before me stopped, and I heard on a large scale the same creaking sound that is produced when a heavy cart passes over frozen snow in winter. I felt that I also had stopped, and instantly threw up both arms to protect my head in case I should again be covered up. I had stopped, but the snow behind me was still in motion; its pressure on my body was so strong that I thought I should be crushed to death. This tremendous pressure lasted but a short time; I was covered up by snow coming from behind me. My first impulse was to try and uncover my head—but this I could not do, the avalanche had frozen by pressure the moment it stopped, and I was frozen in. Whilst trying vainly to move my arms, I suddenly became aware that the hands as far as the wrist had the faculty of motion. The conclusion was easy, they must be above the snow. I set to

work as well as I could; it was time, for I could not have held out much longer. At last I saw a faint glimmer of light. The crust above my head was getting thinner, but I could not reach it any more with my hands; the idea struck me that I might pierce it with my breath. After several efforts I succeeded in doing so, and felt suddenly a rush of air towards my mouth. I saw the sky again through a little round hole. A dead silence reigned around me; I was so surprised to be still alive, and so persuaded at the first moment that none of my fellow-sufferers had survived, that I did not even think of shouting for them. I then made vain efforts to extricate my arms, but found it impossible; the most I could do was to join the ends of my fingers, but they could not reach the snow any longer. After a few minutes I heard a man shouting; what a relief it was to know that I was not the sole survivor, to know that perhaps he was not frozen in and could come to my assistance! I answered; the voice approached, but seemed uncertain where to go, and yet it was now quite near. A sudden exclamation of surprise! Rebot had seen my hands. He cleared my head in an instant, and was about to try and cut me out completely when I saw a foot above the snow, and so near to me that I could touch it with my arms, although they were not quite free yet. I at once tried to move the foot; it was my poor friend's. A pang of agony shot through me as I saw that the foot did not move. Poor B. had lost sensation, and was perhaps already dead. Rebot did his best: after some time he wished me to help him, so he freed my arms a little more so that I could make use of them. I could do but little, for Rebot had torn the axe from my shoulder as soon as he had cleared my head (I generally carry an axe separate from my alpenstock—the blade tied to the belt, and the handle attached to the left shoulder). Before coming to me Rebot had helped Nance out of the snow; he was lying nearly horizontally, and was not much covered over. Nance found Bevard, who was upright in the snow, but covered up to the head. After about twenty minutes the two last-named guides came up. I was at length taken out; the snow had to be cut with the axe down to my feet before I could be pulled out. A few minutes after one o'clock p.m. we came to my poor friend's face. . . . I wished the body to be taken out completely, but nothing could induce the three guides to work

any longer, from the moment they saw that it was too late to save him. I acknowledge that they were nearly as incapable of doing anything as I was. When I was taken out of the snow the cord had to be cut. We tried the end going towards Bennen, but could not move it; it went nearly straight down, and showed us that there was the grave of the bravest guide the Valais ever had, and ever will have. The cold had done its work on us; we could stand it no longer, and began the descent."

VIII

THE MYSTERY OF MALLORY AND IRVINE

from

THE EPIC OF MOUNT EVEREST¹

by SIR FRANCIS YOUNGHUSBAND, K.C.S.I., K.C.I.E.

The 1924 Everest Expedition will always be remembered for the grim fate which overtook Mallory and Irvine at the moment of anticipated success. Mallory was a seasoned mountaineer with two previous expeditions behind him, Irvine was a young man of twenty-two, inexperienced in Alpine climbing yet chosen for his character and personality and his ability to sink his own individuality for the sake of the team. Many speculations have been made as to the tragedy which overtook the two men last seen heading boldly for the summit not more than eight hundred feet away.

The expedition under the leadership of General Bruce with Colonel Norton as his second in command first met with weather conditions and cold of the utmost severity with the thermometer standing at $21\frac{1}{2}$ degrees below zero and were forced back to base. A few days later a more successful start was made and the route to Camp IV established. Four porters, however, became stranded and were rescued only by the superhuman efforts of Norton, Somervell and Mallory, each of whom was far from fit at the time and whose subsequent performances were no doubt affected by their rescue efforts. Finally an assault was launched upon the summit by Mallory and Bruce but the weather so affected the porters that it had to be abandoned. The second pair, Norton and Somervell, attained 28,000 feet, the former going a little farther up to 28,126 feet. Finally Mallory and Irvine made their last historic attempt.

Odell, a geologist and an experienced Alpinist, said to have the perfect temperament for Everest, was in support at Camp V and was the last to see the two men alive as they disappeared from view, striking out for the summit, enveloped in a cloud of mist. The story is taken up at the point where Odell is making his way up from Camp V to Camp VI in support of his comrades who were doomed never to return.



ODELL was thus left completely alone in this tiny eyrie at an altitude of 25,300 feet. No man has ever had such an experience, and it is one we like to dwell on. That evening, as we have seen,

¹ Published by Edward Arnold, London, 1926.

the weather was most promising and the outlook deeply impressive. To the westward was a wild savage jumble of peaks towering above the Rongbuk Glacier, and culminating in the mighty Cho Uyo, 26,750 feet, and Gyachungkang, 25,910 feet, bathed in pinks and yellows of most delicate tints. Right opposite were the gaunt cliffs of the North Peak, the nearness of its massive pyramid of rock only lending greater distance to the wide horizon beyond, and its dark bulk all the more exaggerating the opalescence of the far-away peaks on the northern horizon. To the eastward, floating in thin air, a hundred miles away, was the snowy summit of Kangchenjunga. Nearer was the varied outline of the Gyangkar Range.

Odell had climbed many peaks alone, and witnessed sunsets from not a few, but this, he says, was the crowning experience of all.

We may well believe it. He was in the very midst of the most awe-inspiring region on this earth. He was in the near presence of God. Revealed to him now were the might and majesty, and the purity, the calm and the sublimity of the Great World-Spirit. And being alone, and near the very climax of a great adventure, he must have been impressionable in the highest degree, though only later in tranquillity would he be aware of the deep impress that had been made upon him.

And if the sunset was impressive so also must have been the profound and solemn stillness of the night, and the sparkling brilliance of the stars against the liquid sapphire of the sky.

And then the dawn : the first fresh radiancy of daylight, the increasing colour, the fine delicacy of hues as translucent as wine, the first flush on the peaks, the sapphire of the sky turning to the clearest azure !

Was ever a man more privileged than Odell ! To behold what he beheld was to be exalted for life.

By dawn the next morning he was up. The great day, which was finally to decide the success or failure of the expedition, had arrived. Two hours were occupied in preparing his breakfast and putting on his boots—operations which at that high altitude necessitate great effort—and by eight he was off. Then, carrying a rucksack with provisions in case of shortage at Camp VI, he made his solitary way up the steep slope of snow and ice behind

Camp V till he reached the crest of the main ridge. This was a different route from that followed by Norton and Somervell, who had taken a more slanting direction along the face of the mountain, keeping well below the crest. But it was the one probably followed by Mallory. Odell did not get the glorious view—a view extending to the Tiger Hill behind Darjiling—there must be from the summit of the ridge in clear weather, for he says that, though the earlier morning had been clear and not unduly cold, the rolling banks of mist had now commenced to form and sweep across the great face of the mountain. The wind, however, fortunately for him, and for Mallory and Irvine 2,000 feet above him, did not increase; and there were indications that even the mist might be confined to the lower half of the mountain. So Odell had no qualms about Mallory's progress upward from Camp VI. The wind was light and should not have hampered their progress along the crest of the ridge. And he hoped that by now Mallory and Irvine would be well on their way to the final pyramid of the summit.

Odell's own plan was not to follow the crest of the ridge but to make a rather circuitous route outwards over the northern face. He was a geologist and wanted to examine the geological structure of the mountain. The lower part he had found was formed of a variety of gneisses. But the greater part of the upper half was composed mainly of highly altered limestones; with here and there in small amount light granitoid rocks which break across, or are interbedded with, all the other series. To the layman the significance of this statement is that Mount Everest must have once lain beneath the sea—another revelation of the mighty energy it embodies.

"The whole series," writes Odell, "dips outward from the mountain at about 30° , and since the general slope of this face, about 25,000 feet, is about 40° to 45° , the effect is to make a series of overlapping slabs nearly parallel with the slope, and presenting a number of little faces often up to 50 feet in height, which can be climbed, usually by an easy though steepish route, while most can be entirely circumvented. The rocks are not on the whole rotten in texture since they have been considerably hardened by the igneous intrusions of granitoid rocks. But the slabs are often sprinkled with debris from above, and when to

this is added freshly fallen snow, the labour and toil of climbing at these altitudes may perhaps be imagined. It is not so much the technical difficulty as the awkwardness of uncertain footing on a slope not quite steep enough for the use of one's hands."

It was from about half-way between the two highest camps that Odell caught that last glimpse of Mallory and Irvine which has already been described. He was surprised at their being so late in the day so far from the summit; and reflecting on the cause of this he continued his way up to Camp VI. On arrival there at about two o'clock snow commenced to fall and the wind increased. He placed his load of fresh provisions, etc., inside the tiny tent and took shelter for a while. Within was an assortment of spare clothes, scraps of food, two sleeping-bags, oxygen cylinders and parts of apparatus. Outside were more parts of the apparatus and of the duralumin carriers. But the climbers had left no note, and Odell could know nothing therefore of the time of their departure or what might have intervened to cause delay.

Snow continued to fall, and, after a while, Odell began to wonder whether the weather and conditions higher up might not compel the party to return. Camp VI—that is, this tiny tent—was in rather a concealed position on a ledge and backed by a small crag. In the prevailing conditions the returning party might experience considerable difficulty in finding it. So Odell went out in the direction of the summit, and having scrambled about 200 feet commenced whistling and jodelling in case they should happen to be within hearing. He then took shelter from the driving sleet behind a rock. He could not see more than a few yards ahead so thick was the atmosphere. And in an endeavour to forget the cold he examined the rocks about him. But in the flurry of snow and the biting wind even his ardour for geology began to wane, and within an hour he decided to turn back. Supposing that Mallory and Irvine were returning they could under existing conditions hardly yet be within call.

As he reached Camp VI the squall blew over, and before long the whole north face became bathed in sunshine. The uppermost crags were distinctly seen. But of the climbers there was not a sign.

Odell was now in an awkward predicament. Every inclination

would make him want to stay where he was or even go forward to meet his friends. But Mallory, in his last note, had particularly requested him to return to the North Col and be ready to evacuate Camp IV, and with himself and Irvine proceed to Camp III that same night, in case the monsoon should suddenly break. And the reason why Odell would have to go on ahead was that Camp VI, consisting of only one small tent, was incapable of holding more than two men. If he remained he would have to sleep outside. And to sleep outside at 27,000 feet meant only one thing.

Reluctantly, therefore, Odell was compelled to carry out Mallory's wishes. After partaking of a little food and leaving ample for them, he closed up the tent, and about 4.30 left the camp and made his way down by the extreme crest of the north-east ridge. Halting now and then he would glance up and scan the upper rocks for any sign of the climbers. But he looked in vain. By then they should be well on their way down, but, even if they were, there was little hope of picking them out at that great distance and against such a broken background—unless, indeed, they should be crossing one of the infrequent patches of snow, as had happened in the morning, or be silhouetted on the crest of the ridge. By 6.15 he was abreast of Camp V, but there being no reason to turn aside to it he pressed on and was interested in finding that descending at high altitude is little more fatiguing than descending at moderate altitudes. This gave him confidence that unless the climbers above were completely exhausted they would find themselves able to make faster time downward than they had expected and so escape being benighted. By means of a careful glissade Odell covered the distance between Camps V and IV in barely thirty-five minutes.

At the latter camp he was welcomed by Hazard with a wonderful brew of hot soup and plenty of tea. And being refreshed the two went out again to watch for Mallory and Irvine. The evening was clear and they watched till late that night, but still there were no signs. They could conjecture that they must have been belated and hope that in the moonlight reflected from the surrounding peaks they might find their way to one or other of the upper camps.

The tiny tents of those two camps Odell scrutinised through

his field-glasses the next morning—June 9th—but no movement whatever could be seen. Now deeply anxious he decided once more to return to the mountain. He settled a code of signals with Hazard, using an arrangement of sleeping-bags to be placed against the snow for use by day, and some simple flash lights by night. With some difficulty he persuaded two porters to come with him; and by 12.15 he started. On the way up he encountered that same bitter cross-wind from the west which nearly always prevails and which made the two porters repeatedly falter. But he reached Camp V about half-past three. And here he had to spend the night, for there was no possibility of his being able to reach the higher camp that evening. There was, as he expected, no sign of Mallory and Irvine and the prospects were black indeed.

The weather also was black that night. Gusts of boisterous wind sweeping over the face of the mountain threatened bodily to uproot the two small tents from the slender security of the ledges and carry both tents and men down the mountainside. Fleeting glimpses of a stormy sunset could fitfully be seen through the flying scud. And as the night closed in both wind and cold increased. Thus aggravated by the wind the cold was so intense that Odell was unable to sleep and remained chilled, even inside two sleeping-bags and with all his clothes on.

Morning broke with the wind as strong and the cold as bitter as ever. The two porters refused to be roused; they seemed to be suffering from extreme lassitude or nausea, and only made signs of being sick and wishing to descend. To proceed under the storm conditions about them was more than they could face. All Odell could do was to send them back. But he went on himself.

After seeing them well on their way downward he set off for Camp VI. And this time he took oxygen. He had found in the tent the oxygen apparatus which he had taken up there two days before, and he now carried it but with one cylinder only. He had not much faith in the use of oxygen, but he hoped that by using it he would make quicker time upward. In this, however, he was disappointed. The boisterous and bitter wind, blowing as ever from the west athwart the ridge, was trying in the extreme and he could only make slow progress. From time to time, in order to restore warmth, he would take shelter behind rocks or

crouch low in some recess. But after about an hour he found he was deriving little good from the oxygen. Thinking this might be due to his taking it in only moderate quantities he gave himself more and with longer inspirations. Still, however, the effect was almost negligible—perhaps a trifle allayment in the tire of his legs. He was too well acclimatised to need it and he accordingly switched it off. He decided to proceed with the apparatus on his back but without the objectionable mouthpiece between his lips and depend on direct breathing from the atmosphere; and he seemed to get on quite as well though he was breathing at a rate which would surprise even a long-distance runner.

Thus pressing upward he at length reached Camp VI. There everything was as he had left it. There was not a sign of Mallory and Irvine. And that they had died on the mountain was now certain.

The question was how and when they had died, and if they had reached the summit before they died. In the faint but anxious hope of being able to find some trace of them in the limited time available Odell dumped the oxygen apparatus and immediately set off along the route which Mallory and Irvine would probably have taken in the descent—the crest of the ridge, where he had last seen them on their upward climb. But Everest was in its most forbidding aspect. A darkened atmosphere hid its features, and a gale raced over its cruel face. After struggling on for a couple of hours, looking in vain for a possible clue, he realised that the chances of finding any on such a vast expanse of crags and broken slabs was small indeed. And for any more extensive search towards the final pyramid a further party would have to be organised. In the time available it was impossible for him to extend his search. And only too reluctantly he made his way back to Camp VI.

Seizing the opportunity of a lull in the wind he, with great effort, dragged the two sleeping bags from the tents and up the precipitous rocks behind to a steep snow patch plastered on a bluff of rocks above. So boisterous still was the wind that it needed all his effort to cut steps up the steep snow slope and thus fix the bags in position. Placed in the shape of a T they formed the signal announcing to those 4,000 feet below that no traces of their comrades could be found.

Having made the sad signal Odell returned to the tent, and after taking from it Mallory's compass and the oxygen set of Irvine's design, the only articles which seemed worth while to retrieve, he closed it up and prepared to return.

But before departing he glanced up at the mighty summit above him. Ever and anon it deigned to unveil its cloud-wreathed features. It seemed to look down in cold indifference on him, mere puny man; and, to his petition to yield up the secret of his friends, howl derision in gusts of wind. And yet, as he gazed again, another mood appeared to creep over her haunting features. There seemed to be something alluring in that towering presence. He was almost fascinated. He realised that any mountaineer must be thus fascinated; that he who approached close must ever be led on, and, oblivious of all obstacles, seek to reach that most sacred and highest place of all.

IX

THE FIRST 25,000 FT. PEAK

from

KAMET CONQUERED¹

by F. S. SMYTHE

The first mountain peak exceeding 25,000 feet was conquered in 1931 when Frank Smythe and his party made their assault on Kamet, the summit of which stands 25,447 feet above sea level.

This peak had occupied the attention of mountaineers as far back as 1855 when the Schlagintweit brothers attempted it and reached a height of over 22,000 feet, an amazing performance for those days. The next important expedition in 1877 was mainly for topographical purposes. Dr. Longstaff and General Bruce reconnoitred Kamet in 1907 but found their way to the summit barred by impassable precipices, and Captain Slingsby in 1911 was forced to retreat at 22,000 feet, though this performance was slightly improved upon in 1913. In the same year C. F. Meade, although unsuccessful in reaching the summit, did discover the route to it and in 1920 a further party reached 23,600 feet.

The 1931 expedition established Camp V on June 20th in excellent physical condition and in favourable weather. It was accordingly decided to omit an intervening camp and make for the summit direct in one day. The following day a party including Holdsworth, Shipton and Smythe made the top in eight and a half hours and a day or two later a second party also made the ascent.

The account which follows opens with the first summit party ready to set out from Camp V.



THE night passed; the lightning became feeble and finally died away; petulant gusts of wind set the frost-stiffened canvas rustling and crackling.

A cold dawn filtered into a cold world. With a conscious effort I heaved myself to my knees. The sleeping-bag cracked sharply; it was sheeted with ice deposited by my congealed breath. With numbed fingers I fumbled at the frozen tapes securing the flaps of the tent and, parting them at last, peered outside. A cloudless sky was shot with green and orange; the peaks stood from the

¹ Published by Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1932.

night like pallid statues. I glanced upwards. Dawn was gilding the crest of Kamet. Now was the time to start, but it was too cold—the coldest morning I ever remember in the Himalaya. The world almost creaked in the cold. To have left the comparative shelter of our tents would have meant certain frostbite. It was essential that we should start comfortably, with a hot breakfast inside us, and cooking and eating under such conditions were impossible. I slipped my hands back into my sleeping-bag and busied myself restoring the circulation to my numbed finger-tips. How easily circulation is lost at high altitudes, and how slowly and painfully it returns!

The sun was not long in coming, and we emerged thankfully from our tents into its life-giving rays.

Breakfast was a hurried affair. We craved sugar more than any other substance, but tinned fruit and sardines also went down well, and so did steaming cups of tea.

We spoke but little; our minds were busied by thoughts of what the day might bring forth. At 8 a.m. we started off, on our final push for the summit.

We climbed on two ropes, Shipton and Lewa on one, Holdsworth, Nima Dorje and I on the other. We carried rucksacks with food and spare clothes, and Nima Dorje bore a heavy load consisting of some 20 lb. of cinematograph apparatus.

Between Camp V and the foot of the northern face of Kamet stretched an almost level expanse of snow. We had hoped against hope that the westerly winds which lash the upper regions of the mountain had hardened the surface of the snow into a crust sufficiently solid to enable us to walk comfortably without having to do anything more than kick steps. Our hopes were not fulfilled; we had not marched more than a few yards from the camp before we were sinking in boot deep.

The foot of the slope up which we must go was littered with ice-blocks, fallen from a line of séracs, 1,000 ft. higher. Fortunately, by keeping well to the left, we were able to avoid the danger zone, and were thus spared the ordeal of having to run the gauntlet of ice avalanches.

But the snow, if disagreeably soft, was at least consistent in its softness; it was possible to maintain a rhythm. I have already

written of the importance of maintaining a rhythm in high-altitude mountaineering. It is better to have moderately soft snow consistent in its softness than a mixture of very soft and very hard snow in which rhythmical movement is impossible. Of course, when very soft snow is encountered, rhythm is equally impossible, owing to the difficulty and effort of lifting the foot, and had the snow between Camp V and the summit of Kamet been very soft the whole way, there would have been no hope of reaching the summit in one day, and we should have been forced to pitch a higher camp.

Shipton, Holdsworth and I took it in turns to lead. We did about a quarter of an hour each. Had there been only two of us to stamp out the steps the work would have been very exhausting, but the difference between taking a turn every half an hour and taking it every quarter of an hour at such an altitude is enormous.

In its lower portion the slope was between 30° and 40° in angle: it steepened gradually.

We sat down for a rest. As we sat, our thudding hearts and hard-pressed lungs gradually eased to a more normal rhythm. We had climbed the first 500 ft. in an hour and had reason to congratulate ourselves. Immediately below us were Meade's Col and the camp—toylike tents and snow crumpled with footmarks. Only the Eastern Ibi Gamin overlooked us. To the right was the snowy edge of the eastern precipice. Fleecy clouds were beginning to twist up from the valleys. The plains of Tibet were opening out; their brown and yellow expanses melted into violet distances. Eastwards, Gurla Mandhata rose serenely.

We munched a little chocolate and sipped tea from a Thermos flask. It was gloriously hot in the sun, and as yet no wind had arisen to chill us. Lolling in the snow, I felt languid and sleepy. Further advance seemed unnecessary and even absurd. Why not continue to sit and drowse the day away in the warm sun? I forced myself to take some photographs and change a cinematograph film. It was simple and easy work, yet it involved expenditure of both physical and mental energy.

The few minutes we allowed ourselves soon passed. Shipton and Lewa rose to their feet and started up the slope. It was interesting to watch them. Shipton, a born mountaineer, has

acquired to perfection the art of climbing a snow-slope with the minimum of effort. Lewa, on the other hand, is so constituted that he tends to expend more of his magnificent energy than is necessary. So much fire and dash is his to command that he cannot properly control its tumultuous outflow, and his eager jerky movements contrasted oddly with the almost leisurely rhythm of Shipton. As they toiled through the soft snow, I trained the cine-camera on them and "shot" some film. I remember wishing as I did so that I had not burdened myself with the work of taking a film of the expedition, and I vowed that I would never do it again.

Holdsworth, Nima Dorje and I followed. One moment we had been sitting at ease, fully capable of appreciating the glorious panorama spread out before us; the next moment, almost with a suddenness of a blow, ease had been relegated to the past, and we became once more panting automatons of flesh and blood. Sitting, we had forgotten that we were breathing the thin air of nearly 25,000 ft., but even the effort of rising to our feet served like the touch of a foot on the sensitive throttle of a powerful racing car, to set the machinery of heart and lungs pounding furiously.

The snow worsened. Previously, it had been merely soft, but now we encountered crusted snow of the most malignant type, crust which broke when the whole weight had been transferred to the forward foot, letting us sink helplessly into the soft powdery snow beneath.

Even had we taken snow-raquettes with us they would have been useless—the slope was too steep. Ski also would have been impracticable, for, although the crust was not sufficiently frozen to withstand the weight of a booted man, ski would not have broken it and could not have been edged into it. Rhythmical movement was impossible, and we resigned ourselves to something worse than ordinary toil. Our speed of ascent dropped from 500 ft. to about 300 ft. an hour. From 100 ft. at a stretch by the leader, we were reduced to 50 ft. Jealously we glanced back at the square-topped summit of the Eastern Ibi Gamin, but it was long ere we overtopped it.

Here and there the slope had been riven by crevasses. These were now choked with snow over which we could pass safely,

but in some cases the upper edges of the crevasses rose in steep lips, necessitating a few steps being cut. Step-cutting over 24,000 ft. is dreadfully fatiguing work, and every minute or two the leader had to stop and gasp and gasp for oxygen.

Perhaps 1,000 ft. below the summit we encountered plate-like masses of hard snow, resembling shallow mushrooms several yards in diameter, that had been plastered to the slope by the wind. These plates cracked and slithered away when the foot was placed on them, and we sank knee deep into the powdery snow beneath.

During the ascent of the first 500 ft. we had been content to halt only while the lead was being changed, but now, owing to the exhausting nature of the work, the leader found it necessary to sink down into the snow for a rest every few yards, whilst even those behind were glad to follow his example. During these frequent halts we could discern nearly 3,000 ft. beneath us the second party mounting slowly towards Camp V. If to us they appeared mere dots moving with the slowness of a clock's hour hand, how must we have appeared to them? It was good to see them, for we knew that they must be watching us, and were with us in spirit, urging us on to success.

We arrived at a point where the slope steepened abruptly. Ice-walls and soft snow forced us diagonally to the left towards the edge of the eastern precipice. Now, for the first time since leaving the camp, we could see the final slope separating us from the summit ridge. It was at this slope, 400 ft. high, that we had gazed so doubtfully the evening before. Previous opinion as to its steepness needed no confirmation. From the camp it had looked steep, and we knew now that it *was* steep. Everything depended on its condition. Supposing that the rippled, wind-blown snow covering it concealed hard ice? If step-cutting was necessary throughout its entire height it would be impossible to overcome it without pitching a higher camp. Time would defeat us; it would take many hours—a whole day's work at least. And supposing the slope consisted of snow ready to avalanche if disturbed? There was no avoiding it. Ice-walls barred approach to the right, sheer precipices fell away to the left. Then indeed we should be conclusively beaten. Supposing it proved necessary to pitch a higher camp; was there a ledge on that inhospitable

slope of Kamet where a camp could be pitched? We could see none. And were the porters capable of carrying up equipment? It was doubtful; they were already tired from their exertions between Camps IV and V.

The edge of the eastern precipice abutted as an ill-defined ridge against the final slope. At the point where the ridge merged into the slope a large boulder of Kamet's reddish granite projected from the ice. It looked a welcome resting-place where we might recoup our energies for the final tussle. Up to it we started to climb. Perhaps 100 ft. below the boulder, our feet struck ice beneath the snow. The snow thinned until it was no longer deep enough to hold the foot securely to the ice. Step-cutting became necessary. The leader braced himself to the task. The axe swung back and leapt forward, meeting the ice with a dull thud.

In the Alps, the ringing thud of the axe and the swish and tinkle of dislodged fragments are music in my ears. The confident raising of the body from step to step, by limbs untired and in perfect training, brings happiness and contentment. But cutting steps in ice at 25,000 ft. is a very different matter. The ice-slope is not to be welcomed as providing a test of skill; it is an implacable enemy, mute yet savage, passive yet resistant. It hates.

Thud, thud, thud. There is a duller, less confident ring in the sound of the axe striking the ice. The work stops. Heart and lungs are striving desperately for oxygen; the snow-slope swims uncertainly before the eyes of the exhausted mountaineer. He doubles up, and gasps, and gasps, and gasps.

Presently, his body ceases its clamouring for oxygen. He braces his tired and quivering muscles, grasps his axe, and swings it forward again into the green face of the ice.

Thud, thud, thud.

And so it goes on.

One hundred feet—an hour's unremitting toil. We approached the red boulder and, glancing gratefully at it, promised ourselves a long rest on its sun-warmed surface. But as we cut steps up the ice by the side of it our premature gratitude changed to disgust. The boulder was smooth and sloping and there was no place on it where we could sit. But, in one respect at least, fate was kind; the snow above the boulder lay a foot deep on the ice. One by one, we sank down into it.

Nima Dorje was last on the rope. He was going badly. His feet were slipping from the ice steps and he was using the rope as a hand-hold, a sure sign of exhaustion. As he approached, I could see that his eyes were dull and had lost their animation. His thick lips were parted widely and his lower jaw hung down. It was no surprise to us when, on joining us, he sank into the snow gasping out that he was finished, and could go on no farther. He had bravely done his best and had carried a load of cinematograph apparatus weighing 20 lb. on his back to a height of over 25,000 ft. He soon recovered from his temporary exhaustion, and although it was impossible for him to continue, he was able to return alone safely, for the route was devoid of danger so long as he kept to the uphill track, and a slip on the ice-slope could be attended with no worse consequences than a slide into the soft snow beneath.

It was now 2 p.m. Six hours had passed since we had left Camp V. The first 500 ft. had been climbed in about an hour, but the last 1,300 ft. had taken five hours, an average speed of well under 300 ft. an hour. This slow rate of progress had been due to the terrible snow and the time spent hewing steps in the ice-slope below the boulder. Anxiously we stared at the slope above us. There was no deception as to its steepness. Its average angle was well over 50° —an angle at least as steep as that of the ice-slopes on the Brenva face of Mont Blanc. Everything depended on the condition of the snow. Had the slope been pure ice from top to bottom there would have been no alternative but to retreat and devote our energies during the next two or three days to the difficult task of establishing a higher camp, or possibly of attempting the alternative route from Meade's Col.

As far as the boulder, a slip could not have mattered, but the final slope overlooked the great eastern precipice of Kamet, and a slip on it was not to be thought of. Heaving ourselves wearily to our feet, we recommenced the ascent. Again we found ourselves on disagreeable mushroom-like plates of snow, but on the whole firmer snow than we had encountered lower down. Between these plates there was powder snow, and the foot sank into it, encountering ice. Here step-cutting was necessary. To do it we had to summon up the whole of our mental determination

as well as our physical energy, and both were now dulled by fatigue and altitude. The temptation was to kick steps and trust to the snow holding. Luck had been with us so far, and we could scarcely afford to abuse it now. In places steps were necessary for safety, and I am glad to be able to record that those steps were cut.

The slope steepened until it was practically a wall. We advanced in turn. A few feet at a time was enough, and we would then stop to gasp for oxygen and renewed energy.

I remember that on these occasions, as I leaned forward to rest on my in-driven ice-axe, I could see my feet, a few yards of wind-caked snow-slope, and then the East Kamet Glacier, nearly 7,000 ft. beneath. By the boulder sat the solitary figure of Nima Dorje. The sun was still shining on him, but already we were in chill shadow.

In with the ice-axe and on. The plates of hard snow swished away into the abyss, a gentle sibilant whisper. When I was leading, there was naught but the blank slope before me. When my companions were leading, my vision was limited to their feet. I remember once experiencing a ridiculous feeling of annoyance at the sight of Holdsworth's boot, breaking away one of the evil snow-slabs. I thought savagely to myself, Why can't he kick a better step—why fiddle and fumble in that ridiculous manner? But, when my turn came to lead, my feet kicked just as clumsily. Directly above us the declining sun illuminated a small flake of snow projecting from the summit ridge with a calm gleam. The flake seemed always as far away. Then suddenly, to my surprise, I could touch it. Driving my ice-axe in before me, I hauled myself up on both arms, crushing the flake beneath me. I found myself sprawling, exhausted with the effort, face downwards, across the summit ridge. My head was in the sun, my feet in the shadow. Huge columns of cloud were rising djinn-like from the blue depths into which I gazed. They swayed unsubstantially for a moment as I fought for oxygen. For perhaps a minute I lay gasping like a stranded fish, then, pulling myself together, swung astride the sharp roof-like ridge and began taking in Holdsworth's rope round the ice-axe. Presently, we were all congregated on the ridge.

We had hoped to find ourselves on the summit, or within a

few yards of it, but we saw immediately that we were separated from it by a knife-like crest of snow. As we gazed along the narrow path we must tread, we experienced a pang of apprehension. Some thirty yards distant the ridge rose up into a sharp point. Beyond this nothing was to be seen, but we realised instinctively that the point was not the summit. Slopes of rock and snow, which we could see sloping up beyond it, indicated something higher. Had Kamet a surprise in store for us? What if there was an impracticable cleft in the ridge between us and the summit? We would have given much for a rest, but to rest was impossible, until we had stood upon the point and seen what lay beyond.

We started to toil along the ridge. It was nearly horizontal and exceedingly sharp. On either hand the slopes fell away with great steepness; it seemed incredible that we could have ascended from those shadowy abysses to the right of us. I remember trampling and crushing the delicate snow edge with a careful yet savage deliberation. There must be no mistake now. On the slope below we had been mere automatons—toiling atoms incapable almost of reasoned and coherent thought—but now we were thinking men again, capable of realising our amazing position on this snowy edge of the world. Tiredness was replaced by a fierce exhilaration. The numbed brain leapt into renewed activity. The summit was almost within our grasp; surely it could not escape us now? We gained the point and gazed over and beyond it. At our feet the ridge sank down to a shallow gap. Beyond the gap it merged gently into a small cone of snow—the summit!

We seized hold of Lewa and shoved him on in front of us. As I clutched hold of him, I could hear the breath jerking from him in wheezy gasps. I do not think that he quite understood what we were doing. And so he was first to tread the summit. It was the least compliment we could pay to those splendid men, our porters, to whom we owed the success of our expedition.

As we reached the summit we saw that there was another equally high summit a few yards away, so, to be quite sure, we trudged across to it. Nothing further disputed us and for the last time we sank down into the snow.

X

AVALANCHE ON KANGCHENJUNGA

from

THE ADVENTURES OF A MOUNTAINEER¹

by F. S. SMYTHE

Although previous parties, including that of Aleister Crowley in 1905, had explored the approaches to Kangchenjunga it was not until 1929 that the first serious attempt was made upon it. This expedition was under the command of Dr. Paul Bauer and reached a height of 24,000 feet.

In 1930, Professor Dyhrenfurth organised the International Kangchenjunga Expedition which included British, German, Swiss and Austrian mountaineers. Frank Smythe was a British representative included in the party and was also commissioned to write despatches for "The Times."

The mountain, however, was not yet ready to be conquered and indeed it was not for a further quarter of a century that it submitted. The party arrived at Camp II and was then faced with its biggest obstacle, namely, to overcome a huge ice-wall some five hundred feet high guarding the northern ridge. The greatest danger was the ever-constant threat of avalanches and indeed the party was engulfed when a portion of the ice-wall collapsed and descended upon them with overwhelming fury. The story, which commences at the level of Camp II, tells of the death of the Sherpa porter, Chettan, and the miraculous escape of the other members of the expedition.

Subsequently the men retired to Camp I where it was determined that the former route should be abandoned, and after some exploration of the north-west approaches the monsoon broke and the party returned.



UP to Camp II all had gone well, except that Professor Dyhrenfurth had developed a bad throat and had retired to the base camp. But above the camp the greatest of all our difficulties had to be surmounted. This was the ice wall already mentioned. The only hope of climbing it was at a point where it was considerably broken; yet, had we understood Himalayan conditions, we would not have attempted the ascent, for the ice formed the edge of a glacier that was moving downwards and might break

¹ Published by J. M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., London, 1940.

away at any moment, and to attempt to scale it was a desperate and quite unjustifiable venture.

The climbers consisted of Hermann Hoerlin and Erwin Schnaider, a German and Austrian respectively who had done many great climbs in the Alps, Uli Wieland, a splendid fellow, beloved by all, whose grave is now among the snows of Nanga Parbat, on which he perished in 1934, George Wood-Johnson, and myself. In addition we had with us Duvanel, a cinematographer who was making a film record of the expedition, in which work no danger or hardship was too great to deter him.

We set to work next day. The weather was in poor shape. Snowstorm after snowstorm came sweeping up out of the west and it was bitterly cold; even in our thick eiderdown sleeping-bags we were far from comfortable. Climbing the ice wall proved a no less formidable task than expected. We were able to hack a way up the lower part without extreme difficulty, but presently we came to a point where the wall was vertical, even overhanging, and the ice was black and tough. The only possible way of climbing was for one man to go ahead and cut a step or two in the ice, then hammer in a piton, an iron spike with a ring attached to it. The rope was then threaded through the ring and held from below, and with this support another step or two could be made and another and higher piton driven into the ice.

It was terribly slow work, and I well remember when my turn came of clinging with half-frozen hand to holds, which had to be cut as well as footholds, in the ice, whilst hacking desperately with my ice-axe until heart and lungs could stand no more and I had to stop, gasping and gasping for breath.

For three days this work went on, and I do not believe that more difficult or dangerous ice work has been done in mountaineering.

Now and again as we climbed we heard the roar of ice avalanches falling from the hanging glaciers of Kangchenjunga, and the solemn roll of their echoes reverberating from precipice to precipice seemed full of sinister meaning.

At length the way was almost prepared, and we anticipated that on the following day it should be possible to complete it and pitch the camp on a snowy terrace above the ice wall.

Perhaps it was due to the strain of such exacting work, but

I remember that during the night before the climb was to be completed I was a prey to disturbing dreams, and that my wakeful hours were scarcely less depressing. All my mountaineering instincts revolted against the undertaking. It was unjustifiable; we were courting disaster, and it is not good mountaineering deliberately to court disaster. There was a spirit about the proceedings that I did not understand; perhaps it was due to the fact that it was an international expedition, that we were all on our mettle, as it were, and that no one liked to be the first to give in. National rivalry is a vicious principle at all times and in mountaineering it is nothing short of criminal. International mountaineering expeditions are not in the best interests of mountaineering if they foster the competitive spirit, which in its turn inevitably impairs good judgment in the event of difficulty and danger. Be this as it may, I woke next morning feeling sadly out of form. At the back of my mind was a premonition of disaster. Already we had run far too many risks, and now the work was to be carried through in the face of any and every danger, and regardless of the fact that we were responsible for the lives of our porters. So I told my companions that I was feeling out of sorts, as indeed I was, and that I would remain at the camp that day while they completed their work. In any event I felt justified in making this decision as I had done a full share of work on the mountain.

Schneider was away first. He was accompanied by his servant, a Sherpa porter by the name of Chettan. He was known as "Satan" because of his long, pointed ears and stiff black hair, and was a splendid fellow, one of the "Tigers" of the 1924 Mount Everest expedition. I remember watching him as he trudged up the snow slopes behind his master and thinking what a natural rhythm he had—his pace and stride seemed effortless. Here was the born hillman, the man who had mountains in his blood. It was the last time that I saw him alive.

Duvanel came next, accompanied by three porters carrying his cinematograph apparatus. He was followed by the main party, consisting of Hoerlin, Wieland, and eight porters, all carrying heavy loads. Wood-Johnson had gone down to the base camp to attend to transport matters.

For a few minutes I sat on a packing case outside my tent,

and watched the party as it slowly trudged up the slopes towards the foot of the ice wall. It was a curiously warm morning after the recent snowstorms, and sluggish mists were twined about the precipices of Kangchenjunga; there was not a breath of wind, and the great cirque of mountains about the camp was strangely silent.

There was nothing useful I could do except write letters and a dispatch to *The Times*. I went into my tent to do this, still feeling curiously depressed, and I was actually engaged in writing a letter to a friend describing the dangers we were undergoing when I heard the thunderous roar of an avalanche. We had heard many avalanches fall from Kangchenjunga, but none as loud as this; it sounded very near, horribly near. I dropped my pencil and quickly crawled out of the tent. What I saw I shall never forget.

A portion of the ice wall on which we had been climbing for the past few days had collapsed. Enormous masses of ice, the size of cathedrals, were slowly collapsing with the stately precision of felled factory chimneys. And on the snow slopes immediately beneath the wall stood the party, a straggling line of black dots. Then I saw that they were moving slowly to the left. Actually they were running, but fast movement was impossible at that height through soft snow. They were struggling desperately to avoid the doom that was surely theirs, the thousands of tons of ice that bore down upon them like a tidal wave of a nightmare.

A great blast of wind was displaced by the falling masses, and this caught up the loose snow and whirled and billowed it along before the avalanche like smoke from a cannon. And beneath the white snow clouds I could see tongues and waves of ice blocks shooting downwards with incredible velocity, jumping, sliding, crashing together, a veritable besom of destruction.

Next moment the moving dots disappeared, blotted out like insects beneath a man's foot.

It seemed to happen as though in a dream. I was not conscious of any noise after the first roar I had heard while in my tent. Then, suddenly, came the thought of personal danger. The avalanche was descending the slope straight towards the camp. Self-preservation was uppermost in my mind now. My sole companion was the cook, who was staring open-mouthed at

the spectacle. I yelled to him : "Run for it." I spoke in English, but he understood me, and we both ran as hard as we could away from the camp and the avalanche. It was like running in a nightmare. At every step we sank half-way to the knees in the soft snow, and after a few yards lack of oxygen brought on complete exhaustion and we were compelled to halt. As we did so we looked round, and with immense relief saw that the avalanche was coming to a halt some two hundred yards short of the camp. Only the snow displaced by the wind still whirled far into the air.

My companions had disappeared. They must all be killed. Nevertheless we must do what we could, and I told the cook to get his ice-axe. He did so, and we set out for the scene of the disaster. We went as hard as we could but soon found it was better economy to go slower, as fast movement was impossible through the soft snow at that altitude. As we advanced the clouds of snow began to sift and settle. It was a terrible moment. I expected to see no sign of my companions, nothing but a white expanse. Then suddenly I saw a dark dot away to the left, then some more dots. Thank God ! At all events some were alive.

We toiled on, skirting the edge of the avalanche, which was sharply defined and consisted of huge ice blocks piled several feet high. Two hundred yards from the camp the upward tracks vanished beneath the avalanche, but just to the left of the debris we came on a group of porters. They seemed dazed and were standing quite still, except for one who was diligently probing the debris with his ice-axe. It was my servant, Nima Tendrup. I said : "What are you doing? Is there someone buried there?" And he replied : "Load, sahib. I look for load." It was true. In order to run away from the avalanche he had dropped his load, and this had been swept away by the torrent of ice blocks. The loss of it was now worrying him. The fact that he had escaped by a miracle did not concern him, neither did the possibility that others had not escaped; he had dropped and lost his load, the load had been entrusted to him. In his child-like way he felt that he had abused the trust reposed in him.

A little higher I came upon Wieland, Hoerlin, Duvanel, and their porters. They had had a marvellous escape. They had been on the route where it ran to the left when the avalanche

occurred, and had just saved themselves by running. The route itself had been swept from end to end, and one or two of them had actually been touched by ice blocks on the fringe of the avalanche.

Of Schneider and Chettan there was no sign. They were well ahead and under the ice wall when the avalanche occurred, and it seemed probable that they had been overwhelmed. As we stood debating what was best to be done we heard a shout, and saw Schneider some distance higher. A few minutes later he joined us. He, too, had had a marvellous escape. He had been close beneath the ice wall when it collapsed. He said: "I heard a crack, then down it came, huge masses of ice hundreds of feet above. I thought I was dead, but I ran to the left and the avalanche missed me by five metres."

There was only one of the party missing, Chettan. He had been behind Schneider when the avalanche fell and must have been overwhelmed by the torrent of ice blocks. There seemed little possibility of finding him amidst the waste of broken ice. However, we separated and commenced to search, and presently Wieland saw a hand sticking out between the blocks. We pulled away the debris and extracted the remains of poor Chettan. He was not a pleasant sight, for he had been terribly crushed and mutilated. Taking turns, two of the porters carried him back to the camp. There we buried him in the snow. The grave was dug out with ice-axes, and in it our faithful porter was laid. His companions roasted some rice over a primus stove, and this was scattered on the body, to the accompaniment of muttered prayers; it was his sustenance during his journey to Paradise. Meanwhile we Europeans stood silently around with bare heads. As this was being done the mist, which had hitherto cloaked Kangchenjunga, dispersed and the great mountain shone out in awful majesty. Finally the snow was shovelled over him and an ice-axe driven in to mark the spot. It was a lonely grave, but no king could wish for finer resting-place, a tomb watched over by the third highest mountain of the world.

XI

THE CONQUEST OF MONT BLANC

from

THE ANNALS OF MONT BLANC¹

by CHARLES EDWARD MATHEWS

Horace Benedict de Saussure had a natural love of mountains and a fierce desire to climb Mont Blanc or to see another conquer it. In 1760 and 1761 he offered a large reward to anyone who might find a way to the summit, but it was not until 1786 that Jacques Balmat made the first successful assault in company with Dr. Paccard. Controversy arose as to the exact part played by each man and there have been numerous versions as to the contribution of each. One account which was generally accepted as authoritative, but later shown to be false, was dictated by Balmat to Alexandre Dumas in 1832, forty-six years after the event, and is reproduced here from C. E. Mathews, "Annals." It will be seen that in this statement Balmat claimed that he was the first to set foot upon the summit, that he left the doctor some way from the top but subsequently returned for him and literally forced him to the top.

Those interested in following further the evidence on behalf of the two men should read Mathews' subsequent chapter "Paccard versus Balmat," from which it will be seen that little credence can be placed upon Balmat's version, but it nevertheless remains as an astonishing example of egoism and false-representation.



"At last, on August 8th, 1786, the weather seemed sufficiently settled to venture. I went to Paccard and said, 'Well, Doctor, are you determined? Are you afraid of the cold or the snow or the precipices? Speak out like a man.' 'With you I fear nothing,' was his reply. 'Well then, the time has come to climb the molehill.' The Doctor said that he was quite ready, but just as he shut the door of his house I think his heart failed him a little, for he could not get the key out of the lock and kept turning it first one way and then the other. 'I say, Balmat,' he said, 'if we did the right thing we should take two guides.' 'No,' I replied; 'either you and I go together, or you go with

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the others. I want to be first, not second.' He thought for a moment, drew out the key, put it in his pocket, and with his head bent down followed me mechanically. In about a minute he gave himself a shake and said, 'Well, I must trust to you, Balmat.' 'Forward,' said I, 'and let us trust to Providence.' He tried, but could not sing in tune, which annoyed him. I took him by the arm, and said, 'This project must be known to ourselves only.' We were obliged, however, to take a third person into our confidence. This was the shopkeeper from whom we bought some syrup to mix with the water we should carry. Brandy and wine would have been too strong for such an expedition. As the woman was suspicious we told her everything, and asked her to look out next day on the Dôme du Goûter side about nine o'clock in the morning, as we hoped to be there then. We made all our arrangements, took leave of our wives, and set off about five o'clock in the evening, one taking the right and the other the left side of the Arve so that we might not attract attention. We met again at the village of La Côte. The same evening we slept on the top of La Côte, between the glaciers of Bossons and Taconnay. I carried a rug and used it to muffle the Doctor up like a baby. Thanks to this precaution he passed a tolerable night. As for me, I slept soundly until half-past one. At two the white line appeared, and soon the sun rose without a cloud, brilliant and beautiful, a promise of a glorious day! I awoke the Doctor and we began our day's march. At the end of a quarter of an hour we were struggling with the glacier of Taconnay, a sea full of great crevasses whose depth could not be measured by the eye. The snow bridges gave way under our feet. The Doctor's first steps were halting and uncertain, but the sight of my alertness gave him confidence, and we went on safe and sound. Then began the ascent to the Grands Mulets, which was soon left behind. I showed the Doctor where I had passed the first night. He made an expressive grimace, and kept silent for ten minutes; then, stopping suddenly, said, 'Balmat, do you really think we shall get to the top of Mont Blanc today?' I saw how his thoughts were drifting, and laughingly answered him, but gave no promise. Ascending for about two hours we came to the plateau, where the wind became more and more boisterous, and arrived at last at the projecting

rock known as Les Petits Mulets, when a gust of wind carried off the Doctor's hat. I turned round on hearing his cry, and saw the felt hat careering down the mountain towards Courmayeur. With his arms stretched out he looked after it. 'We must go into mourning for it,' I said; 'you will never see it again for it has gone to Piedmont, and good luck be with it!' It seemed as if my little joke had given offence to the wind, for my mouth had scarcely closed when a more violent gust obliged us to lie down on our stomachs to prevent our following the hat. For ten minutes, rise we could not. The wind lashed the mountain sides and passed whistling over our heads, driving great balls of snow almost as big as houses before it. The Doctor was dismayed, but I only thought of the shopwoman we had told to look out for us about this time on the Dôme du Goûter. At the first respite I rose, but the Doctor could only follow on all fours; we then came to a point from which we could see the village. Taking out my glass, there, twelve thousand feet below, was our gossiping friend and fifty others snatching a glass from hand to hand to look at us. Considerations of self-respect induced the Doctor to stand up, and that moment we saw that we were recognised, he by his big coat, and I by my ordinary clothes. They made signs to us by waving their hats. I replied by waving mine, but alas, the Doctor's had already taken leave. Having used up all his strength in getting on his feet, neither the encouragement from below nor my own earnest entreaties could induce him to continue the ascent. My eloquence exhausted, I told him to keep moving so as not to get benumbed. He listened, without seeming to understand, and replied, 'All right.' I saw that he was suffering from the cold, while I also was nearly frozen. Leaving him the bottle, I went on alone, saying that I should very soon come back to find him. He answered, 'Yes! yes!' and telling him again to be sure not to stand still, I went off. I had hardly gone thirty paces when, on turning round, I saw him actually sitting down on the snow, with his back turned to the wind as some precaution. From that time onward the route presented no very great difficulty, but as I rose higher the air became much less easy to breathe, and I had to stop almost every ten steps and wheeze like one with consumption. I felt as if my lungs had gone and my chest was quite empty. I folded

my handkerchief over my mouth, which made me a little more comfortable as I breathed through it. The cold got worse and worse, and to go a quarter of a league took an hour. I kept walking upward, with my head bent down, but finding that I was on a peak which was new to me, I lifted my head and saw that at last I had reached the summit of Mont Blanc!

"I looked round, trembling for fear that there might yet be further some new unattainable aiguille. But no! no! I had no longer any strength to go higher; the muscles of my legs seemed only held together by my trousers. But behold I was at the end of my journey; I was on a spot where no living being had ever been before, no eagle nor even a chamois! I had come alone, with no help but my own will and my own strength. Everything around belonged to me! I was the monarch of Mont Blanc! I was the statue on this unique pedestal! Ah, then I turned towards Chamonix and waved my hat on the end of my stick. I could see through my glass the response. My subjects in the valley perceived. The whole village was gathered together in the market-place.

"When my first moments of exultation were over, my thoughts turned to my poor Doctor, and I went towards him as quickly as I could, calling out his name and getting greatly alarmed at hearing no reply. In a quarter of an hour, I saw him far off rolled up like a ball, but he was quite immovable and made no reply to the shouts which he must certainly have heard. I found him doubled up with his head between his knees, just like a cat when she makes herself into a muff. Tapping him on the shoulder, he raised his head, and I told him that I had been on the top of Mont Blanc. Even this did not interest him; he only asked, 'Where can I lie down and go to sleep?' I told him he had started to go to the top of the mountain and there he would have to go. I lifted him up from the ground, took him by the shoulder and forced him forward several steps. He seemed quite torpid, and to care neither whether he went up or down. However, his blood seemed to circulate a little more freely after my efforts, and he asked if there were more gloves like those on my hands, which were of hareskin and made especially for this excursion, without fingers. At that moment I would not have parted with both of them even to my brother, but I gave him one. Shortly after six

o'clock we were on the summit and, though the sun shone brilliantly, we saw stars shining in the deep blue sky.

"Beneath was nothing but gaunt peaks, ice, rocks, and snow. The great chain which crosses the Dauphiné and stretches as far as the Tyrol was spread out before us, its four hundred glaciers shining in the sunlight. Could there be space for any green ground on the earth? The lakes of Geneva and Neuchâtel were specks of blue on the horizon. To the left lay the mountains of my dear country all fleecy with snow, and rising from meadows of the richest green. To the right was all Piedmont, and Lombardy as far as Genoa, and Italy was opposite.

"Paccard could see nothing, but I felt no fatigue and scarcely noticed the difficulty of breathing which had an hour before so oppressed me. We stayed thirty-three minutes, until seven o'clock in the evening, and as there would only be two hours and a half more daylight, I began to descend, taking Paccard under his arms, and waving my hat as one last signal to those in the valley. There was no track to guide us, and the wind was so piercingly cold that the snow remained frozen, and we could only see the little round holes which the iron points of our alpenstocks had made. Paccard was like a child, no energy or will. I guided him along the good places, and pushed, or carried him, along the bad. Night came on, and when we had crossed the crevasse at the foot of the Grand Plateau we were in the dark. Paccard stopped every few minutes, saying he could go no farther, and I had to make him, not by persuasion only, but by brute force. At eleven o'clock we left the ice and set foot on solid ground, having lost all the sun's reflected light for more than an hour. Then I allowed Paccard to stop, and was just going to wrap a rug around him when I saw that he could not move his hands. I asked him about them, and he replied that they were useless and with no feeling in them whatever. I took off his gloves, and found his hands were dead white, and my own hand also from which I had taken the glove was quite numb. I said, 'Well, we have three frost-bitten hands between us.' He did not mind, but only wanted to lie down and sleep. He told me, however, to rub them with snow, and that was easily done. I began by rubbing his hands and finished by rubbing my own. Soon sensation returned, but accompanied by pains as sharp as if every vein had

been pricked by needles. I rolled my baby up in his rug and put him to bed under the shelter of a rock; we ate and drank a little; pressed as close to one another as possible, and fell fast asleep.

"In the morning at six o'clock I was awakened by Paccard. 'It is funny, Balmat,' he said, 'I can hear the birds singing, but can see no daylight. Perhaps because I cannot open my eyes,' and yet they were glaring like those of a horned owl. I replied that he was under a delusion and that he ought to see very well. Then he asked for a little snow, and melting it in the hollow of his hand with a little brandy, rubbed his eyelids with it. This done he saw no better, but his eyes watered profusely. 'Very well,' he said, 'having gone blind, how shall I be able to get down?' 'You must hold on to the strap of my knapsack,' I said, 'and walk behind me,' and in this way we descended to the village of La Côte. There I had to leave the Doctor, as I feared my wife would be uneasy, and he managed to get home by feeling his way with his stick. I returned home, and then saw what I looked like. I was quite unrecognisable. My eyes were red, my face black, and my lips blue. Every time I laughed or yawned the blood spouted out from my lips and cheeks, and in addition I was half blind.

"Four days afterwards I set out for Geneva to inform M. de Saussure that I had succeeded in scaling Mont Blanc. He had already heard the news from some Englishmen. He came at once to Chamonix and tried the ascent with me, but the weather only allowed us to get as far as the Montagne de la Côte, and it was not till the following year that he carried out his great project."

XII

DE SAUSSURE VANQUISHES MONT BLANC

from

THE STORY OF MONT BLANC¹

by ALBERT SMITH

Horace Benedict de Saussure, Professor of Natural Philosophy of Geneva, inherited from his birth a fascination for mountains and combined his geological investigations with his mountain travelling. At an early age he became enamoured with Chamonix and its surrounding mountains and made many subsequent excursions to that district.

The ascent of Mont Blanc became something of an obsession and he is said to have offered a handsome reward to anyone who might find a practical route up the monarch of the Alps. It was not, however, until 1786 that the mountain was conquered by Dr. Paccard and Jacques Balmat, though previous attempts had been made including a notable one by De Saussure himself, in company with his friend M. Bourrit, in 1785.

Having heard of the successful outcome of the attack by Paccard and Balmat, De Saussure was again fired with the ambition to set foot upon the summit and in 1787 he set out with an enormous party, including no less than eighteen guides, under the leadership of Balmat, and favoured by excellent weather he realised his life's ambition, remaining some four hours upon the summit. The whole expedition took some four days.



DE SAUSSURE passed the winter of 1786-7 in Provence, engaged in his philosophical pursuits, pleasantly enough. He had learned that Mont Blanc was assailable, and he quietly awaited Balmat's message as to the proper season for him to make the trial.

The sturdy guide made two excursions in June, 1787, without success: but he saw various prognostics in the phenomena of the glacier world of the happiest augury. Accordingly, he wrote to De Saussure, who met him at Sallanche in July, and heard that, a few days previously, he had again reached the summit with two other peasants, Jean Michel Cachat and Alexis Tournier. This ascent, oddly enough, has never been chronicled

in the published lists of the successes. When De Saussure got to Chamouni bad weather came on and continued for a month; but he resolutely resolved to wait there—were it even to the end of the season.

At last, the long-desired chance arrived. On August 3rd, this excellent and indefatigable man fulfilled the ardent wish of his life; and, accompanied by his servant and eighteen guides, arrived at the summit of Mont Blanc. His son was most anxious to accompany him; but De Saussure mistrusted his powers to undergo the great fatigue, and therefore the young man remained at Chamouni with Madame de Saussure and his two sisters. They followed the advance of the courageous party, step by step, through telescopes.

The route taken by De Saussure differed slightly from that now adopted by travellers. The Glacier des Bossons lies in a steep valley, between two ridges of rock. That to the left is formed by one of the huge buttresses of the Aiguille du Midi; and the ascent is now commenced through the steep *Forêt des Pelerins*, which clothes its lower side. The ridge to the right is called the *Montagne de la Côte*, and separates the glaciers of Taconnay and Bossons. Along this latter ridge, De Saussure's caravan commenced the ascent. There was little difficulty or danger in the early part of the journey. They were sure of their footsteps, being either on the grass or the rock itself; and they reached the highest point of the mountain—about 6,000 feet above Chamouni, and 9,500 feet over the level of the sea—in about six hours.

De Saussure was fortunate in the time selected for the ascent. The weather was most favourable, and the snow compact and hard. He encamped, with his party, the first night alone, on the edge of the glacier, on the *Montagne de la Côte*, under a tent. The remains of his old hut were still there; but he preferred the tent, because it left him more at liberty to choose his resting-place wherever he chose.

They started on the ice, the next morning, at half-past six. De Saussure was anxious to be on the way long before this; but there was a protracted squabble amongst the guides about carrying the luggage; not so much on the score of fatigue as from the danger of breaking through the snow from the addi-

tional weight of the load. They encountered a great many difficulties amongst the crevices of the glacier, and De Saussure nearly lost the stand of his barometer, through the carelessness of his servant; it fell from his hand, and, gliding rapidly along the snow, went down a chasm, and stuck in the ice at a considerable depth. This stand was part of the apparatus attached to a compass, a telescope, and several other philosophical instruments; and, observing his chagrin at the loss, one of the guides allowed himself to be let down the crevice by a cord, which was tied under his arms, and so recovered it.

They crossed the glacier until they reached "*une petite chaîne de rocs enclavés dans les neiges*," which must have been the present Grands Mulets. Here they had breakfast at nine o'clock; and the guides again made a long delay. They were not over-anxious to bivouac on an unknown waste of snow, as was their employer, and, therefore, they tried to put off their departure until it would be too late to venture, for want of daylight. But De Saussure was firm: he made them start again, and about half-past one they halted, to dine at another rock—the last of the chain. Their appetites were famous; and as they were now 2,000 or 3,000 feet above the line of eternal frost, the guides hit upon an ingenious device to procure water. They made up a great quantity of snowballs, and began to pelt the side of the rock opposed to the sun, and therefore warm. Part of the snow stuck to the rock, and speedily melted; and they soon had a reservoir which furnished them with as much water as they needed. Here, again, the guides loitered. The warm and secure rock, in the middle of the ice, was a perfect Island of Calypso for them; and De Saussure was now obliged to join persuasion to command, before they would set off.

Between the Grands Mulets and the summit, Mont Blanc forms three tremendous steps, from 800 to 1,000 feet in depth. These are termed Les Montets; and the highest flat surface of the three platforms is known as the Grand Plateau. On the second of these, De Saussure prepared to pass the night, at an elevation of 13,300 feet above the level of the sea. The party arrived here about four in the afternoon, and directly began to excavate a pit in the snow for their lodging. Into this they threw some straw, and the tent was stretched over it. The work was

long and painful, for the guides were beginning to experience the effect of the rarefaction of the air at this height. Robust as they were, and caring nothing for their seven or eight hours of climbing, they could scarcely throw up half a dozen shovelfuls of snow without resting. De Saussure suffered considerably himself; and a raging thirst added to his discomfort. The water they had carried with them was all frozen; and a small charcoal brazier was of little use to supply melted snow for twenty persons.

It now became very cold. The instant the tent was fixed, they all scrambled into the refuge it afforded, and shut up every opening so closely, that at last they nearly suffocated themselves. De Saussure, after a time, could not support the close atmosphere any longer, and crept out into the snow to breathe. The moon was then shining brilliantly, in the middle, as he says, of a jet black sky. Jupiter was peeping over the summit of Mont Blanc, but the light reverberated from the mass of snow about him was so bright that only the stars of the first and second magnitude could be perceived. Soon, however, it became too cold even for our good philosopher, and he crept back into the tent, and passed but a sorry night—the noise of an avalanche on the Grand Plateau rousing him just as he was dropping off to sleep, and effectually disturbing his repose.

When morning came, they were some time getting ready for departure. They had to melt snow for the water necessary for breakfast and the journey to come. They crossed the Grand Plateau, now covered with the debris of the avalanche above alluded to, without any trouble, except that the rarefaction of the air was beginning to attack their lungs; and this inconvenience increased at every step. De Saussure was in hopes that a prolonged rest on Rochers Rouges would restore the forces of his party; but this proved of little advantage. They had not gone a dozen steps before they were compelled to halt again for as long a time as they had been in motion, and in this manner, with great toil and discomfort, they reached the summit.

"At last," says De Saussure, "I had arrived at the long-wished-for end of my desires. As the principal points in the view had been before my eyes for the last two hours of this distressing climb, almost as they would appear from the summit, my arrival was by no means a *coup de théâtre* : it did not even give me the

pleasure that one might imagine. My keenest impression was one of joy at the cessation of all my troubles and anxieties; for the prolonged struggle, and the recollection of the sufferings this victory had cost me, produced rather a feeling of irritation. At the very instant that I stood upon the most elevated point of the summit, I stamped my foot on it more with a sensation of anger than pleasure. Besides, my object was not only to reach the crown of the mountain: I had to make such observations and experiments as would alone give any value to the enterprise, and I was afraid I should only be able to accomplish a portion of my intentions. I had already found out—even on the plateau where we slept—that every careful observation in such a rarefied atmosphere was fatiguing, because you hold your breath unthinkingly; and as the tenuity of the air is obliged to be compensated for by the frequency of respiration, this suspended breathing causes a sensible feeling of uneasiness. I was compelled to rest and pant as much after regarding one of my instruments attentively, as after having mounted one of the steepest slopes.”

The guides contrived to put up the tent, and they built a sort of table, on which the good professor was to conduct his experiments. But he found he was obliged to stop every moment, and give more attention to his breathing than to his instruments. The barometer was down to sixteen inches, so that the air had not much more than half its ordinary density; and the arteries, no longer restrained by the usual pressure, were working with double energy. The whole party complained more or less of fever. As long as they kept perfectly still, they experienced little uneasiness—only a slight nausea and heartburn; but as soon as they moved, or fixed their attention rigidly on any object, or stooped down so as to compress the chest, they were obliged to repose again, almost gasping, for two or three minutes. They had no appetite, and, indeed, had they felt at all hungry, the frozen food they had with them was not very tempting. They did not care to touch the wine or the brandy, finding that these only increased their discomforts. Cold water alone relieved them; and when they had swallowed what little they had with them, one or two of the guides left the summit, and descended at once, unable to bear their sufferings any longer.

De Saussure took some trouble to experimentalise upon the intense blue colour which the sky assumes at great elevations. Before he quitted Geneva, he prepared some sheets of paper of sixteen graduated shades of blue, from the deepest colour to the palest tint, and he numbered these from one to sixteen. He had three sets of these papers made: one he left with his friend M. Senebier at Geneva; the second he gave to his son, who remained at Chamouni; and the third he carried with him to the summit. At noon on the day of the ascent the sky at Geneva was of the seventh tint; at Chamouni, between the fifth and sixth; and on Mont Blanc, between the first and second—the deepest “*bleu du roi*.” The guides all told him they had seen the stars in the broad daylight; but he admits himself he could not discern them.

The party remained four hours on the summit. De Saussure found it impossible to make all the experiments he wished within that time; but it was necessary for them to start, and he left the *magnifique belvédère* (as he terms it) at half-past three in the afternoon.

The snow was now very soft in the sun, and the walking troublesome; but in about an hour and a quarter they came down to their bivouac of the preceding night. As it was still early, De Saussure was unwilling to stay here; and they pushed on, descending the Montets, until they reached what, from the description, must have been the Grands Mulets rocks: and now the third night was to be passed. They made a fresh bivouac: the guides contrived several sheltered places in the nooks and corners of the rock; and De Saussure was more comfortable than he had felt when they were all crowded together under the tent on the plateau. He says, “We supped merrily together, and with famous appetites; after which I passed an excellent night upon my little mattress. It was not until then that I really felt pleased at having accomplished the wish of twenty-seven years—that is to say, dating from my first visit to Chamouni, in 1760—a project I had so often thrown over and taken up again, and which had been such a continual subject of mistrust and anxiety to my family. It had become a perfect disease with me: my eyes never fell on Mont Blanc, visible from so many points in our neighbourhood, without my experiencing a really painful

sensation. At the moment of my reaching the summit I was not really satisfied—I was less so when I left it. I only reflected then upon what I had *not* done. But in the stillness of the night, after having recovered from my fatigue, when I went over the observations I had made—when, especially, I retraced the magnificent expanse of the mountain peaks which I had carried away engraven on my mind—and when I thought I might accomplish on the Col du Géant what, most assuredly, I should never do on Mont Blanc, I enjoyed a true and unalloyed satisfaction.”

At six o'clock the next morning—that of the fourth day of the journey—they left the rocks, and crossing the Taconnay Glacier, reached the hut on the Côte in an hour. They had some trouble, not unmingled with danger, on the Glacier; but at last, about half-past nine, they all stood together in safety on solid ground. In less than three hours, they reached Chamouni.

XIII

VICTORY ON K₂

from

ASCENT OF K₂: SECOND HIGHEST PEAK IN THE WORLD¹

by ARDITO DESIO

Translated by David Moore

The Karakoram chain of mountains in Northern Kashmir, which extends for about 300 miles, contains K₂, a peak of 28,250 feet and second only to Everest in height. It was first attempted in 1902 and again in 1909 and then a further twenty years elapsed till the next attempt. Further expeditions followed in 1938, 1939 and 1952. That of 1939 reached a height of over 27,510 feet but the expedition was marred by tragedy and the 1952 party under Dr. Houston, who had led the 1938 expedition, was forced to abandon the assault at 25,000 feet owing to bad weather and the illness and subsequent death of Art Gilkey, as narrated elsewhere in these pages.

In 1954 the Italian, Professor Ardito Desio, who had long since cherished designs upon K₂ received the necessary permission and support to lead a further attack upon it. It was an expedition organised with meticulous care and foresight and one which allowed itself ample time for its purpose, and above all the leader informs us that it was organised not "to make an attempt" but "to conquer."

On July 30th the assault pair Compagnoni and Lacedelli established Camp IX at 26,575 feet and at 6 p.m. on July 31st reached the summit.



THE weather was calm. At about three p.m. we emerged on to a secondary crest which seemed to offer a suitable site for our camp. Here we erected our tiny high-altitude tent. We were now almost 26,575 feet above sea-level.

It had been agreed that Abram, Bonatti and one of the Hunzas would join us before evening, and that they would bring with them the oxygen cylinders which we should require for the final assault. According to the original plan of the expedition, oxygen masks were to be employed from Camp VI onwards. In practice, however, the bad weather which had dogged us for

¹ Published by Elek Books, London, 1935.

forty days without a break had seriously restricted our transport operations, and as a result the leader of the expedition had been forced to revise his plan of attack. Most of the cylinders had been left at Camps III, IV and V. The few that we had succeeded in bringing up to the "shoulder" would be needed for our final effort. For this reason we had avoided using them except in case of absolute necessity. Fortunately, we were by now thoroughly acclimatised.

The view from Camp IX was indescribably beautiful. But we had eyes only for the sinister wall of rock that towered so menacingly above us. Here, in 1939, Wiessner had twice been halted just as he was beginning to think that victory was within his grasp. Here was the key which might or might not open up before us the gateway to the summit of K2. And so, as the sun sank lower in the heavens, we continued to study that grim rock-face, trying to divine its secret.

Meanwhile, we were beginning to get worried about our companions, who ought by this time to have arrived with the oxygen. Supposing they failed to make it? We hadn't even one cylinder between the two of us. "If the worst comes to the worst we'll manage without," we decided, telling ourselves that, unless the Fates were working against us, success was now absolutely certain.

Suddenly, however, at about four p.m., three black dots appeared over the edge of the plateau. As we were to discover later, the three men whom we could see struggling so painfully up the steep slope were Bonatti, Abram and the Hunza Mahdi.

Would they reach us before it got dark? Alas, no. When the sun sank behind the crest of K2 our three colleagues were still some way off. In a little while now Abram would return alone to Camp VIII. Bonatti and Mahdi, however, were due to join us for the night.

The shadows were lengthening, and still Bonatti and Mahdi had not even reached the beginning of the dangerous traverse across the rock-slabs. And to have ventured on to those evil rocks in the darkness would have been suicidal.

As dusk was falling we heard shouts. At once we came out of the tent. In the semi-darkness we could not see Bonatti and Mahdi, but we recognised their voices. Unfortunately, the high

wind made conversation extremely difficult. At last, however, Lacedelli thought he understood what they were saying. It seemed to him that the shouts came from Bonatti, and that he was telling us that he could manage by himself. Mahdi, on the other hand, apparently wanted to return to Camp VIII. "Go back!" we shouted. "Go back! Leave the masks! Don't come any farther!" It did not even occur to us that our colleague could be thinking of spending the night at such an altitude without a tent or even a sleeping-bag.

Now Bonatti's voice was no longer audible. "Obviously," we thought, "he's taken our advice and gone down below." It would have been the worse for him if he had tried to reach us in the darkness. On those rock-slabs he would have been certain to meet with disaster.

And so we went back into the tent and prepared to fight against the cold. Now began a long, anxious vigil, dominated by the thought of the great trial that awaited us on the morrow. We were chilled to the bone. Our parched throats were beginning to fester. We both had an insatiable thirst. We heated some soup and periodically made ourselves a cup of camomile tea. This was the drink that we always found more refreshing than any other. We ate nothing, for neither of us was hungry.

We lay on our sides—the only way in which it was possible for two people to accommodate themselves in the tiny tent. Vainly we tried to sleep. When we had generated a modicum of warmth and seemed on the point of dozing off one of us would give a sudden start which roused us both. It was our nerves. There was nothing left for us to do but talk. Would it still be fine in the morning? Should we find a solution to the problem of how to scale the wall? Would the oxygen left behind by Bonatti and Mahdi be sufficient for our purpose? How long would it take us to climb the 1,600-odd feet that still lay ahead? Should we be able to get back before darkness fell?

The night was bitterly cold, and it seemed interminable. As soon as a glimmer of light appeared in the eastern sky we emerged from the tent. A disappointment awaited us. Although the sky above was clear, spread out beneath us was an ominous carpet of mist. We searched the snow-covered slope below for the oxygen masks which Bonatti and Mahdi were supposed to

have left there the evening before. Suddenly, to our amazement, we caught sight of a figure receding into the distance. Who was it—Bonatti or Mahdi? From such a long way off it was impossible to tell. We called out to the man at the top of our voices. He stopped and turned round, but he did not answer, and after a moment he resumed his halting progress down the precipitous slope.

We were simply flabbergasted. What in the world could have happened? Had Bonatti or Mahdi come up from Camp VIII this morning? No—for in that event the man would have been moving in our direction. Try as we might, we could find no solution to the mystery. We thought of all the possible explanations except the right one. How could we suspect the truth—namely that two men had survived the rigours of a whole night spent in the open at an altitude of more than 26,000 feet?

By this time we were ready to start. Apart from the oxygen, which we should have to fetch from below, we proposed to take with us only the barest necessities—a hundred feet of rope, ice-axes, crampons, a small movie-camera, an ordinary camera, sugar and caramels, a first-aid pack, a pocket-torch. Nothing to drink. As for the two bags containing the rest of the equipment, we should leave these wherever we happened to find the oxygen masks, collecting them on our way down.

For the record, we each wore two pairs of woollen stockings; a pair of rubber-soled shoes with reinforced uppers consisting of reindeer-hide with a soft lining and an outer covering of fur which came up as far as the knee; long, extra-warm woollen underpants; three pairs of trousers—the first of flannel, the second of eiderdown, and finally an outer pair of very light waterproof cloth; a woollen vest, a flannel shirt, a heavy skiing-blouse, a thick eiderdown jerkin and a light wind- and waterproof jacket; silk gloves and leather gauntlets lined with wool; and a pair of snow-goggles.* Our heads were protected by lamb-skin caps and the hoods of our windproof jackets. We each carried a haversack containing three oxygen cylinders placed horizontally one above the other—total weight about 42 lb., which at an altitude of over 26,000 feet represents a killing

* A second pair of goggles was held in reserve for use in case of necessity.

load. Fortunately, we had got used during recent months to fulfilling the functions of Himalayan mules.

The weather was unsettled. Instead of dissolving, the mist showed a tendency to rise.

This, perhaps, was our most difficult moment—a moment when all the possible excuses for abandoning the project came flooding into our minds. But the thought that by this evening we might be back here with K2 “in the bag” made us feel ashamed of our momentary hesitation.

It was now five a.m. We roped ourselves together, put on our crampons and, leaving the tent as it was, went off to fetch the oxygen cylinders. In order to avoid the dangerous traverse immediately below the camp we advanced a little way in the direction of the rock-barrier, all the time bearing slightly to the right, then plunged straight down through the snow.

Having reached our objective, we hoisted the crates each containing three cylinders on to our backs and looked around us in some uncertainty. The weather seemed to be deteriorating. The mist was slowly rising, in a little while it would have enveloped us completely. A few snowflakes fell. “What do you say?” asked Lacedelli. And Compagnoni—whom Desio had made responsible for the attack on the summit—replied without hesitation: “I say we ought to have a try.”

Back we went, the way we had come. The time was about 6.15. Slowly we climbed towards the barrier of rocks that traverses the east wall. With the oxygen now flowing into our lungs breathing became much easier. But those 42 lb. loads and the pressure of the masks on our heads made progress both slow and painful. Our movements were laboured, on the slightest provocation the weight of our burdens threw us off our balance. Moreover, the snow was so soft that we sank into it up to our waists.

With every step we took we had to sweep the snow away with one hand and then trample it down. Luckily, we were both feeling comparatively energetic. Perhaps we were sustained by the prospect of reaching the summit, by the memory of the vow we had made over the grave of Puchoz, by the thought of our comrades who had sacrificed so much in order to make this attempt possible and who were now counting on us two to

recompense them for all they had endured. If we triumphed, the credit would go to all without distinction. And it was only right and proper that it should.

We had now reached the foot of the wall that held the answer to the whole problem. In front of us rose, at a disconcertingly steep angle, the ice-couloir which fifteen years before Wiessner had attacked directly. But then its bed had been clear and firm, whereas now it was covered with such a mass of snow that it would have been madness to try to climb it.

Accordingly, we decided to launch our assault from a point situated much farther to the left, near the rocks; but here too we met with a repulse. Viewed from below, those rocks did not appear particularly formidable; but as soon as we laid hands on them we realised what a fiendishly difficult task lay ahead of us. The snow that covered the rocks was not as firm as the variety encountered in the Italian Alps. It belonged, one might say, to an entirely different category. As soon as we set foot on it it crumbled away.

We wasted almost two hours in this futile search for a possible route up the wall. Finally, we attempted to follow a course parallel to and immediately to the left of the couloir. Compagnoni climbed a few feet, made frantic but unavailing efforts to secure a purchase on the rocks with his crampons, suddenly lost his footing and went tumbling down into the soft snow. Fortunately, no bones were broken.

Then, in an attempt to force a passage, Lacedelli removed his gloves and his crampons. The mass of rocks that confronted us rose almost sheer to a height of approximately a hundred feet. In the Dolomites—if a standard of comparison is insisted on—it would perhaps be accorded a Higher Third Grade rating. But classifications of this kind are meaningless at altitudes above 26,000 feet. Here, in fact, we found that our resources were already taxed to the limit.

From the mountaineering viewpoint this is perhaps the most difficult section of K2. Without his crampons, Lacedelli made good progress up the rocks, but as soon as he got back on to the snow he found himself in such serious trouble that Compagnoni was forced to take over the leadership. At this point, having

surmounted the rock-barrier, we were confronted by a new obstacle in the shape of an impossible-looking wall of ice.

We did not know what the time was, for we could not look at our watches without committing ourselves to a series of complicated manœuvres. At a rough guess, it must have been nine or ten a.m. Meanwhile the mist had caught up with us and visibility was down almost to zero. And now came another unpleasant discovery: the first oxygen cylinder was exhausted.

Taking it in turns to lead the way, we made a traverse across a series of steep, insidious slabs of rock. It was a most dangerous passage, and we had to exercise the utmost care in order to avoid disaster. Above us towered, like a sinister white canopy, a row of precarious-looking pinnacles of ice which seemed as if they must come crashing down on our heads at any moment.

Having completed this traverse, we fondly expected to find that the worst was over. But it was not. In front of us now rose a very steep snow slope, the surface of which proved to be so treacherous that it took Compagnoni fully an hour to climb another fifty feet. Realising that it would be absurd to continue in this direction, we made a traverse to the left. Our progress was the reverse of rapid, because the snow, which was still very soft and friable, came up almost to our shoulders and any abrupt movement would have been enough to start a minor avalanche. When we at last succeeded in laying hands once more on solid rock we both sighed with relief. Next we rounded, then climbed, a kind of large, squat tower. From time to time the curtain of mist thinned out, affording a faint glimpse of huge masses of snow extending ever upwards into the heavens.

Now we were right on the brink of the enormously high precipice which drops sheer to the very edge of the Godwin-Austen Glacier. If we were to fall from here we should arrive in a few seconds at Base Camp. Suddenly Compagnoni pulled off his mask (only thus was it possible to carry on a conversation) and said: "I have an impression that the second cylinder is on the point of giving out . . . My God! Just look at that drop! We'd better bear to the right."

We accordingly turned off towards the middle of the east wall. We had first to negotiate a ridge of rock, then came a stretch of firm snow traversed by a succession of small crevasses.

So far as we could tell we were now right in the middle of the broad rounded slope which culminates in the summit. But the way was still steep, and it appeared to be getting more so.

The hours went by, and still we continued to climb. Suddenly an icy gust of wind dispersed the mist that surrounded us, and looking up we saw the great white slope gently curving away into the sky. We would have said that immediately behind that hump was the summit. Could it be true? A moment later the clouds beneath us also parted. We looked back and there, far, far below, were the two tents of Camp VIII. Beside the two tiny red rectangles were two moving black dots—our colleagues. The sight was a great comfort to us.

Suddenly, at intervals of a few seconds, we both experienced a horrible sensation. We found ourselves gasping for breath, an oppressively hot feeling surged through our heads and feet, our legs grew weak, we could no longer stand.

The feeling of utter prostration resulting from our inability to breathe was—to put it mildly—most unpleasant. For a moment, indeed, we were absolutely terrified. Then we realised what had happened: our supply of oxygen was exhausted. At once we snatched off our masks, inhaled deeply, strove to rally our remaining forces. And in fact, little by little, that terrible feeling of constriction disappeared.

“How do you feel?” “Oh, not so bad.” We were amazed to find that, although we were no longer wearing our oxygen masks, our strength remained undiminished. Our conviction that the summit was now near, coupled with the fact that the weather was clearing, increased our determination tenfold.

But then a doubt assailed us. Could we be sure our reasoning was not at fault? Might we not be deluding ourselves? Mountaineers who have climbed without oxygen to altitudes in the region of 26,000 feet speak of mental confusion, delirium, hallucinations. Could it not be the same with us?

Anxiously, as if afraid of finding some ominous symptom, we subjected ourselves to a sort of intelligence test. We tried to do some elementary reasoning—something along these lines: “That’s Broad Peak over there. Its summit is now some distance below us. Therefore we can’t be far from the summit of K2.”

No. Our minds too were functioning perfectly adequately,

so we were justified in going on. And another thing—we had feared that the lack of oxygen would result in a loss of energy, but this was not so. True, as we climbed our hearts felt as if they were bursting, and after every two or three steps we had to stop until the crisis had passed. The crates containing the empty cylinders weighed upon us like leaden cloaks.

But why, the reader may ask—why, having exhausted our reserves of oxygen, did we not rid ourselves of these oppressive burdens? Our reasons for not doing so were four in number:

First, in order to discard the crates we should have had to throw ourselves flat on the snow, which was very deep and unstable. The operation would accordingly have been both difficult and dangerous, particularly as the slope at this point was exceedingly steep.

Secondly, we were convinced that it would require very little further effort to reach the summit.

Thirdly, the sun was already sinking and every minute was precious.

Fourthly, we were by no means hostile to the idea of leaving something bulky and solid on the summit as evidence of our achievement.

Unfortunately, the summit was not so near as we thought. We had expected that above the hump the slope would flatten out. But here a bitter disappointment awaited us, for as we reached the top of the hump yet another long slope greeted our eyes.

Three or four steps and then a halt, during which we leant with all our weight on our ice-axes. Happily, our minds continued to function properly. The only unusual thing was an intense buzzing in our ears. In that buzzing we seemed to discern a faint voice, as if an invisible being were standing at our side, ceaselessly whispering: "Courage! You're almost there now! A few minutes and it'll all be over! Think—you're nearly there!"

Meanwhile, a wide patch of blue sky had appeared, and now the mountain was entirely free of mist. The ice glinted in the sunlight. The clouds fled before the north wind, which was so freezingly cold that we felt as if icy knives were cutting our faces and even penetrating our clothes.

It was difficult, particularly in view of the altitude and our exhausted condition, to assess the temperature. Probably, however, something in the region of 40° below zero would have been a fair estimate.

The final section of the route consisted of a broad, gently sloping ridge of snow, extending from left to right. All of a sudden we perceived that the slope was becoming less pronounced; the snow was getting firmer and, thank God, we were no longer sinking into it. The angle of the slope continued to diminish, by this time the ground was almost flat—now it *was* flat! We looked about us, hardly able to believe the evidence of our senses. After months and months of striving we had come to the end of our journey. Above us now there was nothing but blue sky.

But were we actually on the summit? In front of us, a considerable distance away, we could see another ridge. We knew that to the north of the summit there was a secondary peak—we had observed it from Base Camp. But we wanted to be quite certain. Lest we should have cause to reproach ourselves later on we lowered our eyes and sighted the horizon. No, our peak was the higher of the two. No matter where we looked, there was absolutely nothing above us. The time was six p.m.

XIV

ACCIDENT ON THE MEIJE

from

THE "ALPINE JOURNAL"

November, 1885

On July 26th, 1885, Otto and Emil Zsigmondy and L. Purtscheller ascended the Meije by a new route without guides. Scarcely had the news of their success been made known when in trying to discover a new route up the same peak from the south on August 6th, Emil Zsigmondy lost his life.

On this latter expedition the two brothers were accompanied by Dr. Schulz and having arrived at an impassable rock pillar Otto prepared to retreat but Emil tried to climb up alone. Ultimately forced to retire he hatched a rope around a rocky spur and commenced the descent. To the horror of those below, who had a premonition of disaster, the rope slipped off the spur and although caught up by Otto and Schulz it broke, almost carrying the other two men over a precipice. Emil himself fell some 2,000 feet to the glacier below to be discovered by the others four hours later.

This account reprinted from the "Alpine Journal" was originally published by Otto Zsigmondy in the "Oesterreichische Alpenzeitung" of August 1885 and translated for the former journal. Readers interested in pursuing this story further may care to read Charles Gos's "Alpine Tragedy" (Allen and Unwin, 1948), Chapter 14, "The Brightness that will never fade."



"ON August 5th we were in La Bérarde. The weather was fine; Emil, Dr. Schulz and myself went up the Tête de la Maye, while Kellerbauer and Purtscheller made the ascent of the Tête du Roujet. While on the summit we discussed our plan of making the ascent of the Meije on the following day, in pursuance of a promise which we had made to Dr. Schulz. I wished to follow the usual way up, but my brother was very keen to strike out a new route which he had examined on August 3rd, when on the Aiguille de Plat. This involved attacking the south wall of the Meije immediately below the Pic Oriental, and climbing towards the Grand Pic by a rocky ledge (Felsband) which mounts in that direction, and is marked out by numerous patches of ice. We saw very well from the Tête de la Maye that this ledge came to an end at a wide couloir which is below the gap between the Grand Pic and the last of the great teeth in the

ridge leading towards the Pic Central; and it was there that we expected to encounter the most serious difficulties.

"We returned to La Bérarde, procured provisions, and the same afternoon we three went up to the Châtelleret, a club hut in the Vallon des Etançons, about two hours from La Bérarde, and spent the night there.

"The next day (August 6th) we started about two o'clock by lantern light, and by very inconvenient slopes of moraine reached the Glacier des Etançons, which we crossed in a N.E. direction, finding many crevasses and holes. About 6 a.m. we gained the rocks under the Pic Oriental. The passage from the ice to the rocks presented very great difficulties, after overcoming which we found ourselves on the rocky ledge of which I have spoken before. Here we were exposed to heavy falls of stones, the weather was threatening, a storm began to rage. After some time the storm subsided, and the weather then became very fine. Amid ever increasing difficulties we pushed on along the rocky ledge, which was for the most part covered with fresh snow heaped together and then frozen. The snow did not extend as far as the precipice; there was generally a space between them, and it was along this that we were able to climb by the aid of our crampons. Here and there the ledge was interrupted by very steep terraces of rock, about 10 metres high, the overcoming of which was attended with great difficulties. Finally, in this way we reached the last ice-patch, which lies under the second of the great teeth, counting westward from the Pic Central, but this was gained only with very great trouble. We were now unable any longer to continue traversing the face to the left as we had been doing, and had to climb straight up this ice-patch by the aid of steps. After successfully accomplishing this, we climbed about 40 metres over smooth, difficult rocks almost straight up, and gained a horizontal terrace. Our object now was to gain the great couloir of which I have already made mention. To do this it was necessary to cross over a rock pillar (Felspfeiler), which projected from the wall. My brother Emil clambered up it by working up one side of it obliquely, but he could not get down on the other side without taking off the rope. Before doing this, Schulz and I got round the pillar by help of the rope let down to us from above. On the other

side there was good foothold, and we thus found ourselves on the continuation, as it were, of the horizontal terrace. On my suggestion, we left the rope hanging here (my brother having untied himself), in order in any case to secure our retreat. Professor Schulz remained here and slept a little while, my brother and myself going off on a reconnaissance. The terrace soon narrowed considerably and became a horizontal crack along which we walked as far as the edge of the great couloir. By bending forward we could then look down into it. It was glazed with ice, the sides smooth and steep; in the opinion of both of us it was impossible to advance farther in this direction. This reconnaissance took three-quarters of an hour or an hour. We went back to the place where Dr. Schulz had remained, by aid of the rope got round the rock pillar; then I climbed up it to disentangle the rope, and came back to the terrace.

"From where we were standing, several couloirs led up the wall above us. My brother remarked that now there was nothing left for us but to try one of these couloirs. He attempted that on the right, but came back, after he had got up about 10 metres, in consequence of our urgent request and wish. This attempt was made when he was not tied with the rope. I was now convinced that the attainment of the summit by this way was impossible, and I very decidedly urged a retreat, especially as it was 1.30 p.m. Professor Schulz then said to my brother, 'Now, Emil, what do you think, haven't you yet given up all hope?' And my brother replied, 'What would one have if one hadn't some hope?' (*Was bliebe einem, wenn man nicht die Hoffnung hätte*). No one spoke of renewing the attempt.

"Without discussing the matter, and before we expected it, my brother began to climb straight up the rocks, having previously fastened our Manilla rope round his body. The rocks here were precipitous and smooth. The only way seemed to be a shallow gully which ran obliquely upwards; but, looked at from below, it offered hardly any hold, though of course we below could form no decided opinion on this point. About 30 metres above where we were standing there was a similar though rather smaller terrace; my brother clearly aimed at reaching this in order to see how it was above, but, as I have stated before, not a word was uttered on this matter.

"We were now 250-300 metres (=c. 820-984 feet) below the Grand Pic, or about 3,600 metres high according to Dr. Schulz's aneroid. Five metres above us was a projecting block, on which there was a small ledge, which was the only place where one could find the necessary foothold."

"After our 17 metres (=51 feet) of Manilla rope had been paid out, Emil called out to us below, asking whether we could climb up after him a little way in order to give him a few more metres of rope, saying that he did not think he was very far from the upper ledge, and wanted very much to get quite on to it. I had no more wish for experiments, for I held any further attempt to be objectless; but naturally I had just as little idea that Emil would get into a place where he was not quite secure. I could think so all the less as in the attempt just before he had acted in so very careful a way.

"Although I was decidedly against a further advance, I could not, placed where I was, judge whether Emil's situation did not perhaps render it desirable or even essential that he should have the rope he asked for; so I called out, 'Professor Schulz's 20 metre silk rope is still here—if you really wish it very much we will tie ourselves with it.' He replied in a joyful voice, 'Ah, that's all right' (Ach, das ist gescheit). These were the last words I heard him utter. We tied ourselves with the silk rope, paid it out slowly, and Emil climbed very cautiously up till he was about one metre below the second terrace already mentioned. Here probably the overhanging rocks rendered further progress impossible, and Emil appeared to be preparing to come down again. He threw the rope around a rocky tooth to the left, and commenced the descent. It was after he had got down about a metre that the terrible fall occurred. The loop of rope slipped off the tooth, as was clearly shown by the sudden slackening. Just before Dr. Schulz said, 'If only nothing happens to him!' At this moment there first came into my head the idea that Emil might fall, and almost at the same time the fall took place. I heard immediately after a noise over my head,* caught hold at once of the coil of rope which was all ready to pay out, and

* We are authorised by Herr Otto Zsigmondy to omit certain words occurring here in the original, stating that he heard his brother utter a cry. He writes, "These words came erroneously, without my knowledge, into print. My brother uttered no sound at the fatal moment."

wound it round my arms and hands. Professor Schulz too must have seized the rope while it was quickly running out, for his little finger was injured. The next instant I received a frightful blow on the head, which for the time deprived me of consciousness. (Probably this was due to the fall of one of the ice-axes, which were all stacked together. Mine was carried away by the rope.) The rope was torn away from a rocky tooth close by me round which I had hastily thrown it; I was swung round, fell my whole length on my right side, was dragged down a little way, and found myself over the precipice, but grasped a rocky tooth with both arms, and was thus able to hold fast. But the rope broke! It seemed to me that it broke in the air, but I am not very sure. When I came to myself (my swoon can hardly have lasted half a second) I noticed the broken rope fluttering in the air, and saw at the same moment the fall of my brother, and his descent on to a small ice-field below us. All this took only a few seconds. My brother can hardly have realised his frightful position; he uttered no cry or shriek of horror; everything took place with incredible rapidity. A small ice-field was about 40 metres below us, it was the last ice-field up which we had climbed. Beneath it there is a perpendicular precipice of 600-700 metres (= c. 2,000 to 2,500 feet) to the glacier. If the ice had been covered with deep soft snow, Emil's fall would probably have been stopped there, especially as the rope had greatly diminished the speed of his descent, and there would have been the possibility that at least his life might have been saved. But when he slid down over the little ice-field, which was as smooth as a mirror, the frightful catastrophe became inevitable, for there followed a terrible fall over a wall 2,000 feet high! . . .

"My head was hurt, my face streamed with blood, the thumb on my left hand was broken, the rope had cut deeply into my arms and hands, and because of my fall my right side was severely bruised.

"Schulz and I at once began the descent, despite the bewilderment caused by this frightful accident, and hurried down as fast as possible; for, however unreasonable (*unberechtigt*) it may seem, before I had convinced myself of the reality of what had just happened I could not give up a last glimmer of hope.

"As the silk rope was broken, we had only a bit of about five

metres, and the descent proved extremely difficult. We followed the same route as on the way up, save that we got from the rocks to the ice by another way which my poor brother had discovered on the ascent. At last, after four anxious, wearing hours, we reached the Glacier des Etançons, on which we found the body lying, not far from the rocks, and immediately under the place where the accident had happened. The first look told me that my last hopes were gone. . . .

"We two went down to the Châtelleret hut, where we arrived at 9.30 p.m. The next day we descended to La Bérarde, where we found Purtscheller and Professor Kellerbauer. The former got together five men to recover the body. These went as far as the edge of the glacier, two ventured on the ice itself, but Purtscheller himself had to undertake the heavy work of bringing down the body, as the men were of no use for this purpose. That day (August 7th) the body was brought down to the edge of the glacier; next day two other men were engaged, and Purtscheller with the body reached La Bérarde about 1 p.m. The bringing it down was attended with the greatest difficulties, and Purtscheller showed the greatest self-sacrifice in accomplishing it."

Herr E. Zsigmondy was a Protestant, but notwithstanding, M. Vallier, the new curé of S. Christophe (the *chef-lieu* of the valley three hours below La Bérarde), who showed the greatest sympathy and kindness throughout, permitted the burial to take place in his little churchyard. On the 9th the evidence of the survivors was taken and the necessary legal formalities gone through. The funeral, which was attended by his four mourning companions, the authorities of the village, and most of the inhabitants, took place on August 10th, the burial rites being performed by a Dutch minister, Monsieur J. G. Van Ryn, who happened to be at Venosc. Professor Kellerbauer delivered a funeral oration, and laid the broken rope on the grave with a wreath of edelweiss; Herr Purtscheller's rope, which had so often joined him to his unfortunate friend, was used to lower the coffin to its resting place.

XV

THE CREVASSE

from

ANNAPURNA: CONQUEST OF THE FIRST
8,000 METRE PEAK (26,493 FEET)¹

by MAURICE HERZOG

Translated from the French by Nea Morin and Janet Adam Smith

The story of the successful French attempt on the Himalayan giant, Annapurna, will forever remain one of the classics of mountain literature. The assault and the almost unbelievable rigours of the descent are enshrined in the graphic account of the leader of the 1950 French expedition, Maurice Herzog. The climb was remarkable in many ways, it was the first victorious assault of a peak of 8,000 metres, the way up the mountain was uncharted and moreover, even the approaches required the blazing of an original trail.

The ultimate success of the expedition was no doubt due to the leader's realisation that its only chance depended upon an all-out dash from Camp V rather than risk a longer stay upon the mountain in establishing a Camp VI. Even more stirring than the account of the last final dash to the summit is the story of the successive chapter of accidents which led first to the frost-bite of Herzog and then of his colleague Lachenal culminating in a hazardous retreat against stupendous odds. Nothing could more vividly display the heroism of these great mountaineers than that part of the narrative of "Annapurna" which tells of the struggles of Herzog, Lachenal, Rébuffat and Terray as they force their way back to Camp IV. The extract given below commences with the return of Herzog and Lachenal from the summit and their reception by their waiting friends. As the reader will see, their immediate joy was short-lived as the realisation that Herzog had lost his gloves was speedily followed by the accident to Lachenal. The succeeding chapters of "Annapurna" are equally gripping, dealing as they do with the dreadful sufferings of the whole party before they finally reached the safety of Katmandu.



REBUFFAT and Terray received the great news with excitement and delight.

"But what about Biscante?" asked Terray anxiously.

"He won't be long. He was just in front of me! What a day—

¹Published by Jonathan Cape, London, 1952.

started out at six this morning—didn't stop . . . got up at last."

Words failed me. I had so much to say. The sight of familiar faces dispelled the strange feeling that I had experienced since morning, and I became, once more, just a mountaineer.

Terray, who was speechless with delight, wrung my hands. Then the smile vanished from his face: "Maurice—your hands!" There was an uneasy silence. I had forgotten that I had lost my gloves: my fingers were violet and white, and hard as wood. The other two stared at them in dismay—they realised the full seriousness of the injury. But, still blissfully floating on a sea of joy remote from reality, I leant over towards Terray and said confidentially, "You're in such splendid form, and you've done so marvellously, it's absolutely tragic you didn't come up there with us!"

"What I did was for the expedition, my dear Maurice, and anyway you've got up, and that's a victory for the whole lot of us."

I nearly burst with happiness. How could I tell him all that his answer meant to me? The rapture I had felt on the summit, which might have seemed a purely personal, egotistical emotion, had been transformed by his words into a complete and perfect joy with no shadow upon it. His answer proved that this victory was not just one man's achievement, a matter for personal pride; no—and Terray was the first to understand this—it was a victory for us all, a victory for mankind itself.

"Hi! Help! Help!"

"Biscante!" exclaimed the others.

Still half intoxicated and remote from reality, I had heard nothing. Terray felt a chill at his heart, and his thoughts flew to his partner on so many unforgettable climbs; together they had so often skirted death, and won so many splendid victories. Putting his head out, and seeing Lachenal clinging to the slope a hundred yards lower down, he dressed in frantic haste.

Out he went. But the slope was bare now; Lachenal had disappeared. Terray was horribly startled, and could only utter unintelligible cries. It was a ghastly moment for him. A violent wind sent the mist tearing by. Under the stress of emotion Terray had not realised how it falsified distances.

"Biscante! Biscante!"

He had spotted him, through a rift in the mist, lying on the slope much lower down than he had thought. Terray set his teeth, and glissaded down like a madman. How would he stop? How would he be able to brake, without crampons, on the wind-hardened snow? But Terray was a first-class skier, and with a jump turn he stopped beside Lachenal, who was concussed after his tremendous fall. In a state of collapse, with no ice-axe, balaclava or gloves, and only one crampon, he gazed vacantly round him.

"My feet are frost-bitten. Take me down . . . take me down, so that Oudot can see to me."

"It can't be done," explained Terray regretfully. "Can't you see we're in the middle of a storm. . . . It'll be dark soon."

But Lachenal was obsessed by the fear of amputation. With a gesture of despair he tore the axe out of Terray's hands and tried to force his way down, but soon saw the futility of his action, and resolved to climb up to the camp. While Terray cut steps without stopping, Lachenal, ravaged and exhausted as he was, dragged himself along on all fours.

Meanwhile I had gone into Rébuffat's tent. He was appalled at the sight of my hands and, as rather incoherently I told him what we had done, he took a piece of rope and began flicking my fingers. Then he took off my boots, with great difficulty, for my feet were swollen, and beat my feet and rubbed me. We soon heard Terray giving Lachenal the same treatment in the other tent.

For our comrades it was a tragic moment: Annapurna was conquered, and the first "eight-thousander" had been climbed. Every one of us had been ready to sacrifice everything for this. Yet, as they looked at our feet and hands, what can Terray and Rébuffat have felt?

Outside the storm howled and the snow was still falling. The mist grew thicker and darkness came. As on the previous night we had to cling to the poles to prevent the tents being carried away by the wind. The only two air-mattresses were given to Lachenal and myself while Terray and Rébuffat both sat on ropes, rucksacks and provisions to keep themselves well off the

snow. They rubbed, slapped and beat us with a rope; sometimes the blows fell on the living flesh, and howls arose from both tents. Rébuffat persevered; it was essential to continue, painful as it was. Gradually life returned to my feet as well as to my hands, and circulation started again. It was the same with Lachenal.

Now Terray summoned up the energy to prepare some hot drinks. He called to Rébuffat that he would pass him a mug, so two hands stretched out towards each other between the two tents and were instantly covered with snow. The liquid was boiling though at scarcely more than 60° Centigrade (140° Fahrenheit). I swallowed it greedily and felt infinitely better.

The night was absolute hell. Frightful onslaughts of wind battered us incessantly, while the never-ceasing snow piled up on the tents.

Now and again I heard voices from next door—it was Terray massaging Lachenal with admirable perseverance, only stopping to ply him with hot drinks. In our tent Rébuffat was quite worn out, but satisfied that warmth was returning to my limbs.

Lying half-unconscious I was scarcely aware of the passage of time. There were moments when I was able to see our situation in its true dramatic light, but the rest of the time I was plunged in an inexplicable stupor with no thought for the consequences of our victory.

As the night wore on the snow lay heavier on the tent, and once again I had the frightful feeling of being slowly and silently asphyxiated. Occasionally in an access of revolt I tried, with all the strength of which I was capable, to push off with both fore-arms the mass that was crushing me. These fearful exertions left me gasping for breath and I fell back into the same state as before. It was much worse than the previous night.

“Hi! Gaston! Gaston!”

I recognised Terray’s voice.

“Time to be off!”

I heard the sounds without grasping their meaning. Was it light already? I was not in the least surprised that the other two had given up all thought of going to the top, and I did not at all grasp the measure of their sacrifice.

Outside the storm redoubled in violence. The tent shook and the fabric flapped alarmingly. It had usually been fine in the mornings: did this mean the monsoon was upon us? We knew it was not far off—could this be its first onslaught?

"Gaston! Are you ready?" Terray asked again.

"One minute," answered Rébuffat. He did not have an easy job: he had to put my boots on and do everything to get me ready: I let myself be handled like a baby. In the other tent Terray finished dressing Lachenal, whose feet were still swollen and would not fit into his boots. So Terray gave him his own, which were bigger. To get Lachenal's on to his own feet he had to make some slits in them. As a precaution he put a sleeping bag and some food into his sack and shouted to us to do the same. Were his words lost in the storm? Or were we too intent on leaving this hellish place to listen to his instructions?

Lachenal and Terray were already outside.

"We're going down!" they shouted.

Then Rébuffat tied me on to the rope, and we went out. There were only two ice-axes for the four of us, so Rébuffat and Terray took them as a matter of course. For a moment, as we left the two tents of Camp V, I felt childishly ashamed at abandoning all our good equipment.

Already the first rope seemed a long way down below us. We were blinded by the squalls of snow and we could not hear each other a yard away. We had both put on our *cagoules*, for it was very cold. The snow was apt to slide and the rope often came in useful.

Ahead of us the other two were losing no time. Lachenal went first and, safeguarded by Terray, he forced the pace in his anxiety to get down. There were no tracks to show us the way, but it was engraved on all our minds—straight down the slope for 400 yards then traverse to the left for 150 yards to 200 yards to get to Camp IV. The snow was thinning and the wind less violent. Was it going to clear? We hardly dared to hope so. A wall of seracs brought us up short.

"It's to the left," I said, "I remember perfectly."

Somebody else thought it was to the right. We started going down again. The wind had dropped completely, but the snow fell in big flakes. The mist was thick, and, not to lose each other,

we walked in line: I was third and I could barely see Lachenal, who was first. It was impossible to recognise any of the pitches. We were all experienced enough mountaineers to know that even on familiar ground it is easy to make mistakes in such weather—distances are deceptive, one cannot tell whether one is going up or down. We kept colliding with hummocks which we had taken for hollows. The mist, the falling snowflakes, the carpet of snow, all merged into the same whitish tone and confused our vision. The towering outlines of the seracs took on fantastic shapes and seemed to move slowly round us.

Our situation was not desperate, we were certainly not lost. We would have to go lower down: the traverse must begin farther on—I remember the serac which served as a milestone. The snow stuck to our *cagoules*, and turned us into white phantoms noiselessly flitting against a background equally white. We began to sink in dreadfully, and there is nothing worse for bodies already on the verge of exhaustion.

Were we too high or too low? No one could tell. Perhaps we had better try slanting over to the left! The snow was in a bad state, but we did not seem to realise the danger. We were forced to admit that we were not on the right route, so we retraced our steps and climbed up above the serac which overhung us—no doubt, we reflected, we should be on the right level now. With Rébuffat leading, we went back over the way which had cost us such an effort. I followed him jerkily, saying nothing, and determined to go on to the end. If Rébuffat had fallen I could never have held him.

We went doggedly on from one serac to another. Each time we thought we had recognised the right route, and each time there was a fresh disappointment. If only the mist would lift, if only the snow would stop for a second! On the slope it seemed to be growing deeper every minute. Only Terray and Rébuffat were capable of breaking the trail and they relieved each other at regular intervals, without a word and without a second's hesitation.

I admired this determination of Rébuffat's for which he is so justly famed. He did not intend to die! With the strength of desperation and at the price of superhuman effort he forged ahead. The slowness of his progress would have dismayed even

the most obstinate climber, but he would not give up, and in the end the mountain yielded in face of his perseverance.

Terray, when his turn came, charged madly ahead. He was like a force of nature: at all costs he would break down these prison walls that penned us in. His physical strength was exceptional, his will-power no less remarkable. Lachenal gave him considerable trouble. Perhaps he was not quite in his right mind. He said it was no use going on; we must dig a hole in the snow and wait for fine weather. He swore at Terray and called him a madman. Nobody but Terray would have been capable of dealing with him—he just tugged sharply on the rope and Lachenal was forced to follow.

We were well and truly lost.

The weather did not seem likely to improve. A minute ago we had still had ideas about which way to go—now we had none. This way or that. . . . We went on at random to allow for the chance of a miracle which appeared increasingly unlikely. The instinct of self-preservation in the two fit members of the party alternated with a hopelessness which made them completely irresponsible. Each in turn did the silliest things: Terray traversed the steep and avalanchy slopes with one crampon badly adjusted. He and Rébuffat performed incredible feats of balance without the least slip.

Camp IV was certainly on the left, on the edge of the Sickle. On that point we were all agreed. But it was very hard to find. The wall of ice that gave it such magnificent protection was now our enemy, for it hid the tents from us. In mist like this we should have to be right on top of them before we spotted them.

Perhaps if we called, someone would hear us? Lachenal gave the signal, but snow absorbs sound, and his shout seemed to carry only a few yards. All four of us called out together: "One . . . two . . . three . . . Help!"

We got the impression that our united shout carried a long way, so we began again: "One . . . two . . . three . . . Help!" Not a sound in reply!

Now and again Terray took off his boots and rubbed his feet; the sight of our frost-bitten limbs had made him aware of the danger and he had the strength of mind to do something about

it. Like Lachenal, he was haunted by the idea of amputation. For me, it was too late: my feet and hands, already affected from yesterday, were beginning to freeze up again.

We had eaten nothing since the day before, and we had been on the go the whole time, but man's resources of energy in face of death are inexhaustible. When the end seems imminent, there still remain reserves, though it needs tremendous will-power to call them up.

Time passed, but we had no idea of it. Night was approaching, and we were terrified, though none of us uttered a complaint. Rébuffat and I found a way we thought we remembered, but were brought to a halt by the extreme steepness of the slope—the mist turned it into a vertical wall. We were to find, next day, that at that moment we had been almost on top of the camp, and that the wall was the very one that sheltered the tents which would have been our salvation.

"We must find a crevasse."

"We can't stay here all night!"

"A hole—it's the only thing."

"We'll all die in it."

Night had suddenly fallen and it was essential to come to a decision without wasting another minute; if we remained on the slope, we should be dead before morning. We should have to bivouac. What the conditions would be like, we could guess, for we all knew what it meant to bivouac above 23,000 feet.

With his axe Terray began to dig a hole. Lachenal went over to a snow-filled crevasse a few yards farther on, then suddenly let out a yell and disappeared before our eyes. We stood helpless: would we, or rather would Terray and Rébuffat, have enough strength for all the manœuvres with the rope that would be needed to get him out? The crevasse was completely blocked up save for the one little hole where Lachenal had fallen through.

"Hi! Lachenal!" called Terray.

A voice, muffled by many thicknesses of ice and snow, came up to us. It was impossible to make out what it was saying.

"Hi! Lachenal!"

Terray jerked the rope violently; this time we could hear.

"I'm here!"

"Anything broken?"

"No ! It'll do for the night ! Come along."

This shelter was heaven-sent. None of us would have had the strength to dig a hole big enough to protect the lot of us from the wind. Without hesitation Terray let himself drop into the crevasse, and a loud "Come on !" told us he had arrived safely. In my turn I let myself go : it was a proper toboggan-slide. I shot down a sort of twisting tunnel, very steep, and about 30 feet long. I came out at great speed into the opening beyond and was literally hurled to the bottom of the crevasse. We let Rébuffat know he could come by giving a tug on the rope.

The intense cold of this minute grotto shrivelled us up, the enclosing walls of ice were damp and the floor a carpet of fresh snow; by huddling together there was just room for the four of us. Icicles hung from the ceiling and we broke some of them off to make more head room and kept little bits to suck—it was a long time since we had had anything to drink.

That was our shelter for the night. At least we should be protected from the wind, and the temperature could remain fairly even, though the damp was extremely unpleasant. We settled ourselves in the dark as best we could. As always in a bivouac, we took off our boots; without this precaution the constriction would cause immediate frost-bite. Terray unrolled the sleeping-bag which he had had the foresight to bring, and settled himself in relative comfort. We put on everything warm that we had, and to avoid contact with the snow I sat on the cine-camera. We huddled close up to each other, in our search for a hypothetical position in which the warmth of all bodies could be combined without loss, but we could not keep still for a second.

We did not open our mouths—signs were less of an effort than words. Every man withdrew into himself and took refuge in his own inner world. Terray massaged Lachenal's feet; Rébuffat felt his feet freezing, too, but he had sufficient strength to rub them himself. I remained motionless, unseeing. My feet and hands went on freezing, but what could be done? I attempted to forget suffering, to forget the passing of time, trying not to feel the devouring and numbing cold which insidiously gained upon us.

Terray shared his sleeping-bag with Lachenal, putting his

feet and hands inside the precious eiderdown. At the same time he went on rubbing.

"Anyhow the frost-bite won't spread further," he was thinking.

None of us could make a movement without upsetting the others, and the positions we had taken up with such care were continually being altered so that we had to start all over again. This kept us busy. Rébuffat persevered with his rubbing and complained of his feet; like Terray he was thinking: "We mustn't look beyond tomorrow—afterwards we'll see." But he was not blind to the fact that "afterwards" was one big question mark.

Terray generously tried to give me part of his sleeping-bag. He had understood the seriousness of my condition, and knew why it was that I said nothing and remained quite passive; he realised that I had abandoned all hope for myself. He massaged me for nearly two hours: his feet, too, might have frozen, but he did not appear to give the matter a thought. I found new courage simply in contemplating his unselfishness; he was doing so much to help me that it would have been ungrateful of me not to go on struggling to live. Though my heart was like a lump of ice itself, I was astonished to feel no pain. Everything material about me seemed to have dropped away. I seemed to be quite clear in my thoughts and yet I floated in a kind of peaceful happiness. There was still a breath of life in me, but it dwindled steadily as the hours went by. Terray's massage no longer had any effect upon me. All was over, I thought. Was not this cavern the most beautiful grave I could hope for? Death caused me no grief, no regret—I smiled at the thought.

After hours of torpor, a voice mumbled, "Daylight!" This made some impression on the others. I only felt surprised—I had not thought that daylight would penetrate so far down.

"Too early to start," said Rébuffat.

A ghastly light spread through our grotto and we could just vaguely make out the shapes of each other's heads. A queer noise from a long way off came down to us—a sort of prolonged hiss. The noise increased. Suddenly I was buried, blinded, smothered beneath an avalanche of new snow. The icy snow spread over the cavern, finding its way through every gap in our clothing. I

ducked my head between my knees and covered myself with both arms. The snow flowed on and on. There was a silence. We were not completely buried, but there was snow everywhere. We got up, taking care not to bang our heads against the ceiling of ice, and tried to shake ourselves. We were all in our stockinged feet in the snow. The first thing to do was to find our boots.

Rébuffat and Terray began to search, and realised at once that they were blind. Yesterday they had taken off their glasses to lead us down, and now they were paying for it. Lachenal was the first to lay hands upon a pair of boots. He tried to put them on, but they were Rébuffat's. Rébuffat attempted to climb up the shoot down which we had come yesterday, and which the avalanche had followed in its turn.

"Hi, Gaston! What's the weather like?" called up Terray.

"Can't see a thing. It's blowing hard."

We were still groping for our things. Terray found his boots and put them on awkwardly, unable to see what he was doing. Lachenal helped him, but he was all on edge and fearfully impatient, in striking contrast to my immobility. Terray then went up the icy channel, puffing and blowing, and at last reached the outer world. He was met by terrible gusts of wind that cut right through him and lashed his face.

"Bad weather," he said to himself, "this time it's the end. We're lost . . . we'll never come through."

At the bottom of the crevasse there were still two of us looking for our boots. Lachenal poked fiercely with an ice-axe. I was calmer and tried to proceed more rationally. We extracted crampons and an axe in turn from the snow, but still not boots.

Well—so this cavern was to be our last resting-place! There was very little room—we were bent double and got in each other's way. Lachenal decided to go out without his boots. He called out frantically, hauled himself up on the rope, trying to get a hold or to wriggle his way up, digging his toes into the snow walls. Terray from outside pulled as hard as he could: I watched him go; he gathered speed and disappeared.

When he emerged from the opening he saw the sky was clear and blue, and he began to run like a madman, shrieking, "It's fine, it's fine!"

I set to work again to search the cave. The boots *had* to be found, or Lachenal and I were done for. On all fours, with nothing on my hands or feet, I raked the snow, stirring it round this way and that, hoping every second to come upon something hard. I was no longer capable of thinking—I reacted like an animal fighting for its life.

I found one boot! The other was tied to it—a pair! Having ransacked the whole cave I at last found the other pair. But in spite of all my efforts I could not find the camera, and gave up in despair. There was no question of putting my boots on—my hands were like lumps of wood and I could hold nothing in my fingers; my feet were very swollen—I should never be able to get boots on them. I twisted the rope round the boots as well as I could and called up the shoot:

“Lionel . . . boots!”

There was no answer, but he must have heard, for with a jerk the precious boots shot up. Soon after the rope came down again. My turn. I wound the rope round me; I could not pull it tight so I made a whole series of little knots. Their combined strength, I hoped, would be enough to hold me. I had no strength to shout again; I gave a great tug on the rope, and Terray understood.

At the first step I had to kick a niche in the hard snow for my toes. Farther on I expected to be able to get up more easily by wedging myself across the tunnel. I wriggled up a few yards like this and then I tried to dig my hands and my feet into the wall. My hands were stiff and hard right up to the wrists and my feet had no feeling up to the ankles; the joints were inflexible and this hampered me greatly.

Somehow or other I succeeded in working my way up, while Terray pulled so hard he nearly choked me. I began to see more distinctly and so knew that I must be nearing the opening. Often I fell back, but I clung on and wedged myself in again as best I could. My heart was bursting, and I was forced to rest. A fresh wave of energy enabled me to crawl to the top. I pulled myself out by clutching Terray's legs; *he* was just about all in and I was in the last stages of exhaustion. Terray was close to me and I whispered:

“Lionel . . . I'm dying!”

He supported me and helped me away from the crevasse. Lachenal and Rébuffat were sitting in the snow a few yards away. The instant Lionel let go of me I sank down and dragged myself along on all fours.

The weather was perfect. Quantities of snow had fallen the day before and the mountains were resplendent. Never had I seen them look so beautiful—our last day would be magnificent.

Rébuffat and Terray were completely blind; as he came along with me Terray knocked into things and I had to direct him. Rébuffat, too, could not move a step without guidance. It was terrifying to be blind when there was danger all round. Lachenal's frozen feet affected his nervous system. His behaviour was disquieting—he was possessed by the most fantastic ideas :

"I tell you we must go down . . . down there. . . ."

"You've nothing on your feet!"

"Don't worry about that."

"You're off your head. The way is not there . . . it's to the left!"

He was already standing up; he wanted to go straight down to the bottom of the glacier. Terray held him back, made him sit down, and though he couldn't see, helped put his boots on.

Behind them I was living in my own private dream. I knew the end was near, but it was the end that all mountaineers wish for—an end in keeping with their ruling passion. I was consciously grateful to the mountains for being so beautiful for me that day, and as awed by their silence as if I had been in church. I was in no pain, and had no worry. My utter calmness was alarming. Terray came staggering towards me, and I told him : "It's all over for me. Go on . . . you have a chance . . . you must take it . . . over to the left . . . that's the way."

I felt better after telling him that. But Terray would have none of it : "We'll help you. If we get away, so will you."

At this moment Lachenal shouted : "Help! Help!"

Obviously he didn't know what he was doing. . . . Or did he? He was the only one of the four of us who could see Camp II down below. Perhaps his calls would be heard. They were shouts of despair, reminding me tragically of some climbers lost in the Mont Blanc massif whom I had endeavoured to save. Now it was our turn. The impression was vivid : we were lost.

I joined in with the others: "One . . . two . . . three . . . *Help!* One . . . two . . . three . . . *Help!*" We tried to shout all together, but without much success; our voices could not have carried more than ten feet. The noise I made was more of a whisper than a shout. Terray insisted that I should put my boots on, but my hands were dead. Neither Rébuffat nor Terray, who were unable to see, could help much, so I said to Lachenal: "Come and help me put my boots on."

"Don't be silly, we must go down!"

And off he went once again in the wrong direction, straight down. I was not in the least angry with him: he had been sorely tried by the altitude and by everything he had gone through.

Terray resolutely got out his knife, and with fumbling hands slit the uppers of my boots back and front. Split in two like this I could get them on, but it was not easy and I had to make several attempts. I lost heart—what was the use of it all anyway since I was going to stay where I was? But Terray pulled violently and finally he succeeded. He laced up my now gigantic boots, missing out half the hooks. I was ready now. But how was I going to walk with my stiff joints?

"To the left, Lionel!"

"You're crazy, Maurice," said Lachenal. "It's to the right, straight down."

Terray did not know what to think of these conflicting views. He had not given up, like me: he was going to fight; but what, at the moment, could he do? The three of them discussed which way to go.

I remained sitting in the snow. Gradually my mind lost grip—why should I struggle? I would just let myself drift. I saw pictures of shady slopes, peaceful paths, there was a scent of resin. It was pleasant—I was going to die in my own mountains. My body had no feeling—everything was frozen.

"Aah . . . aah!"

Was it a groan or a call? I gathered my strength for one cry: "They're coming!" The others heard me and shouted for joy. What a miraculous apparition! "Schatz. . . It's Schatz!"

Barely 200 yards away Marcel Schatz, waist-deep in snow, was coming slowly towards us like a boat over the surface of the slope. I found this vision of a strong and invincible deliverer

inexpressibly moving. I expected everything of him. The shock was violent, and quite shattered me. Death clutched at me and I gave myself up.

When I came to again the wish to live returned and I experienced a violent revulsion of feeling. All was not lost! As Schatz came nearer my eyes never left him for a second—twenty yards—ten yards—he came straight towards me. Why? Without a word he leant over me, held me close, hugged me, and his warm breath revived me.

I could not make the slightest movement—I was like marble. My heart was overwhelmed by such tremendous feelings and yet my eyes remained dry.

“Well done, Maurice. It’s marvellous!”

XVI

HANNIBAL CROSSES THE ALPS

from

LIVY, BOOK XXI¹

Translated by B. O. Foster

One of the greatest mountaineering stories of all time took place many centuries before man took up mountain climbing as a sport. In the Punic Wars in 218 B.C. Hannibal made military history with his epic crossing of the Alps. At that time, as Commander in Spain, with a picked force of troops, full baggage train and elephants he made his way over the Alps, overran the Po Valley and went on to campaign against Rome.

Livy has called the Second Punic War the most memorable of all wars ever waged up to that time and in Book XXI he gives a graphic account of the fighting as Hannibal makes his mighty crossing of the mountain barrier.



HANNIBAL, leaving the Druentia, and advancing for the most part through a champaign country, reached the Alps without being molested by the Gauls who inhabited those regions. Then, though report, which is wont to exaggerate uncertain dangers, had already taught them what to expect, still, the near view of the lofty mountains, with their snows almost merging in the sky; the shapeless hovels perched on crags; the frost-bitten flocks and beasts of burden; the shaggy, unkempt men; animals and inanimate objects alike stiff with cold, and all more dreadful to look upon than words can tell, renewed their consternation. As their column began to mount the first slopes, mountaineers were discovered posted on the heights above, who, had they lain concealed in hidden valleys, might have sprung out suddenly and attacked them with great rout and slaughter. Hannibal gave the command to halt, and sent forward some Gauls to reconnoitre. When informed by them that there was no getting by that way, he encamped in the most extensive valley to be found in a wilderness of rocks and precipices. He then employed these same Gauls, whose speech and customs did not differ

¹Loeb Classical Library. Published by William Heinemann, London, 1929.

greatly from those of the mountaineers, to mingle in their councils, and in this way learned that his enemies guarded the pass only by day, and at night dispersed, every man to his own home. As soon as it was light, he advanced up the hills, as though he hoped to rush the defile by an open attack in the daytime. Then having spent the day in feigning a purpose other than his real one, he entrenched a camp on the spot where he had halted. But no sooner did he perceive that the mountaineers had dispersed from the heights and relaxed their vigilance, than, leaving for show more fires than the numbers of those who remained in camp demanded; leaving, too, the baggage and the cavalry and a great part of the infantry, he put himself at the head of some light-armed soldiers—all his bravest men—and, marching swiftly to the head of the defile, occupied those very heights which the enemy had held.

With the ensuing dawn the Carthaginians broke camp and the remainder of their army began to move. The natives, on a signal being given, were already coming in from their fastnesses to occupy their customary post, when they suddenly perceived that some of their enemies were in possession of the heights and threatened them from above, and that others were marching through the pass. Both facts presenting themselves at the same time to their eyes and minds kept them for a moment rooted to the spot. Then, when they saw the helter-skelter in the pass and the column becoming embarrassed by its own confusion, the horses especially being frightened and unmanageable, they thought that whatever they could add themselves to consternation of the troops would be sufficient to destroy them, and rushed down from the cliffs on either side, over trails and trackless ground alike, with all the ease of habit. Then indeed the Phoenicians had to contend at one and the same time against their foes and the difficulties of the ground, and the struggle amongst themselves, as each endeavoured to outstrip the rest in escaping from the danger, was greater than the struggle with the enemy. The horses occasioned the greatest peril to the column. Terrified by the discordant yells, which the woods and ravines redoubled with their echoes, they quaked with fear; and if they happened to be hit or wounded, were so maddened that they made enormous havoc not only of men but of every sort of

baggage. Indeed the crowding in the pass, which was steep and precipitous on both sides, caused many—some of them armed men—to be flung down to a great depth; but when beasts of burden with their packs went hurtling down, it was just like the crash of falling walls. Dreadful as these sights were, still Hannibal halted for a little while and held back his men, so as not to augment the terror and confusion. Then, when he saw that the column was being broken in two, and there was danger lest he might have got his army over to no avail, if it were stripped of its baggage, he charged down from the higher ground and routed the enemy by the very impetus of the attack, though he added to the disorder amongst his own troops. But the flurry thus occasioned quickly subsided, as soon as the roads were cleared by the flight of the mountaineers; and the whole army was presently brought over the pass, not only without molestation but almost in silence. Hannibal then seized a stronghold which was the chief place in that region, together with the outlying hamlets, and with the captured food and flocks supported his troops for three days. And in those three days, being hindered neither by the natives, who had been utterly cowed at the outset, nor very greatly by the nature of the country, he covered a good deal of ground.

They came next to another canton, thickly settled for a mountain district. There, not by open fighting, but by his own devices, trickery and deception, Hannibal was all but circumvented. The elder headmen of the strongholds waited on him, as a deputation, and said that, taught by other men's misfortunes—a useful warning—they preferred to experience the friendship of the Phoenicians rather than their might; they were ready, therefore, to carry out his orders, and they requested him to accept provisions and guides and also hostages as a guarantee of good faith. Hannibal, neither blindly trusting nor yet repulsing them, lest, being spurned, they might become openly hostile, returned a friendly answer, accepted the proffered hostages, and used the supplies, which they had brought down, themselves, to the road. But he drew up his column, before following their guides, by no means as though for a march through a friendly country. The van was made up of elephants and cavalry; he himself, with the main strength of the infantry,

came next, looking warily about him and watching everything. When they had got to a narrow place, which was overhung on one side by a ridge, the tribesmen rose up on every quarter from their ambush and assailed them, front and rear, fighting hand to hand and at long range, and rolling down huge boulders on the marching troops. The rear-guard bore the brunt of the attack, and as the infantry faced about to meet it, it was very evident that if the column had not been strengthened at that point, it must have suffered a great disaster in this pass. Even so, they were in the utmost peril and came near destruction. For while Hannibal was hesitating to send his division down into the defile since he had no troops left to secure the rear of the infantry, as he himself secured that of the horse, the mountaineers rushed in on his flank, and breaking through the column, established themselves in the road, so that Hannibal spent one night without cavalry or baggage.

On the following day, since by now the barbarians were attacking with less vigour, his forces were re-united and surmounted the pass; and though they suffered some casualties, still they lost more baggage animals than men. From this point on the mountaineers appeared in smaller numbers, and, more in the manner of brigandage than warfare, attacked sometimes the van, sometimes the rear, whenever the ground afforded an advantage, or the invaders, pushing on too far ahead or lagging behind, gave opportunity. The elephants could be induced to move but very slowly along the steep and narrow trails; but wherever they went they made the column safe from its enemies, who were unaccustomed to the beasts and afraid of venturing too near them.

On the ninth day they arrived at the summit of the Alps, having come for the most part over trackless wastes and by roundabout routes, owing either to the dishonesty of their guides, or—when they would not trust the guides—to their blindly entering some valley, guessing at the way. For two days they lay encamped on the summit. The soldiers, worn with toil and fighting, were permitted to rest; and a number of baggage animals which had fallen among the rocks made their way to the camp by following the tracks of the army. Exhausted and discouraged as the soldiers were by many hardships, a snow-

storm—for the constellation of the Pleiades was now setting—threw them into a great fear. The ground was everywhere covered deep with snow when at dawn they began to march, and as the column moved slowly on, dejection and despair were to be read in every countenance. Then Hannibal, who had gone on before the standards, made the army halt on a certain promontory which commanded an extensive prospect, and pointing out Italy to them, and just under the Alps the plains about the Po, he told them that they were now scaling the ramparts not only of Italy, but of Rome itself; the rest of the way would be level or downhill; and after one, or, at the most, two battles, they would have in their hands and in their power the citadel and capital of Italy.

The column now began to make some progress, and even the enemy had ceased to annoy them, except to make a stealthy raid, as occasion offered. But the way was much more difficult than the ascent had been, as indeed the slope of the Alps on the Italian side is in general more precipitous in proportion as it is shorter. For practically every road was steep, narrow and treacherous, so that neither could they keep from slipping, nor could those who had been thrown a little off their balance retain their footing, but came down, one on top of the other, and the beasts on top of the men.

They then came to a much narrower cliff, and with rocks so perpendicular that it was difficult for an unencumbered soldier to manage the descent, though he felt his way and clung with his hands to the bushes and roots that projected here and there. The place had been precipitous before, and a recent landslide had carried it away to the depth of a good thousand feet. There the cavalry came to a halt, as though they had reached the end of the road, and as Hannibal was wondering what it could be that held the column back, word was brought to him that the cliff was impassable. Going then to inspect the place himself, he thought that there was nothing for it but to lead the army round, over trackless and untrodden steeps, however circuitous the detour might be. But that way proved to be insuperable; for above the old, untouched snow lay a fresh deposit of moderate depth, through which, as it was soft and not very deep, the men in front found it easy to advance; but when it had been trampled

down by the feet of so many men and beasts, the rest had to make their way over the bare ice beneath and the slush of the melting snow. Then came a terrible struggle on the slippery surface, for it afforded them no foothold, while the downward slope made their feet the more quickly slide from under them; so that whether they tried to pull themselves up with their hands, or used their knees, these supports themselves would slip, and down they would come again! Neither were there any stems or roots about, by which a man could pull himself up with foot or hand—only smooth ice and thawing snow, on which they were continually rolling. But the baggage animals, as they went over the snow, would sometimes even cut into the lowest crust, and pitching forward and striking out with their hoofs, as they struggled to rise, would break clean through it, so that numbers of them were caught fast, as if entrapped, in the hard, deep-frozen snow.

At last, when men and beasts had been worn out to no avail, they encamped upon the ridge, after having, with the utmost difficulty, cleared enough ground even for this purpose, so much snow were they obliged to dig out and remove. The soldiers were then set to work to construct a road across the cliff—their only possible way. Since they had to cut through the rock, they felled some huge trees that grew near at hand, and lopping off their branches, made an enormous pile of logs. This they set on fire, as soon as the wind blew fresh enough to make it burn, and pouring vinegar over the glowing rocks, caused them to crumble. After thus heating the crag with fire, they opened a way in it with iron tools, and relieved the steepness of the slope with zigzags of an easy gradient, so that not only the baggage animals but even the elephants could be led down. Four days were consumed at the cliff, and the animals nearly perished of starvation; for the mountain tops are all practically bare, and such grass as does grow is buried under snow. Lower down one comes to valleys and sunny slopes and rivulets, and near them woods, and places that begin to be fitter for man's habitation. There the beasts were turned out to graze, and the men, exhausted with toiling at the road, were allowed to rest. Thence they descended in three days' time into the plain, through a region now that was less forbidding, as was the character of its inhabitants.

XVII

THE CALL OF THE MOUNTAINS

from

MY CLIMBS IN THE ALPS AND CAUCASSUS¹

by A. F. MUMMERY

Why do men continually seek to pit themselves against Nature? Why do they set their skill, intelligence, wits and physical strength against the might of mountains rearing themselves five miles or more into the heavens? Why, knowing full well the risks involved not only in the climbing itself but moreover in the vagaries of the weather which can at any moment unleash upon them violent storms bringing in their wake almost impossible conditions of snow and ice and the ever-dreaded onslaught of the avalanche, do men still venture to give battle with the silent peaks of Nature.

Many writers have set down the reasons which compel them to the mountains but perhaps no such description is more real than that of A. F. Mummery. Mummery devoted some twenty-five years of his life to climbing. He realised a life's dream when in 1895 he led a party to the Himalayas and as fate would have it the mountains claimed from him the supreme penalty for he disappeared when leading the first attack on Nanga Parbat.



WELL-KNOWN climbers, whose opinions necessarily carry the greatest weight, have recently declared their belief that the dangers of mountaineering no longer exist. Skill, knowledge and textbooks have hurled them to the limbo of exploded bogies. I would fain agree with this optimistic conclusion, but I cannot forget that the first guide to whom I was ever roped, and one who possessed—may I say it?—more knowledge of mountains than is to be found even in the Badminton library, was none the less killed on the Brouillard Mont Blanc, and his son, more recently, on Koshtantau. The memory of two rollicking parties, comprising seven men, who one day in 1879 were climbing on the west face of the Matterhorn, passes with ghost-like admonition before my mind and bids me remember that of these seven, Mr. Penhall was killed on the Wetterhorn, Ferdinand Imseng

¹ Published by Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1936.

on the Macugnaga Monte Rosa, and Johann Petrus on the Fresnay Mont Blanc. To say that any single one of these men was less careful and competent, or had less knowledge of all that pertains to the climber's craft, than we who yet survive, is obviously and patently absurd. Our best efforts must sometimes be seconded by the great goddess of Luck; to her should the Alpine Club offer its vows and thanksgivings.

Indeed, if we consider for a moment the essence of the sport of mountaineering, it is obvious that it consists, and consists exclusively, in pitting the climber's skill against the difficulties opposed by the mountain. Any increase in skill involves, *pari passu*, an increase in the difficulties grappled with. From the Breuil ridge of the Matterhorn we pass on to the Dru, and from the Dru to the Aiguille de Grépon: or to take a yet wider range, from the Chamonix Mont Blanc to the same mountain by way of the Brenva Glacier and the Aiguille Blanche de Péteret. It can scarcely be argued that Bennen and Walter were less fit to grapple with the cliff above the "Linceul" than we moderns to climb the Grépon "crack"; or that Jacques Balmat was less able to lead up the "Ancien passage" than Emile Rey to storm the ghastly precipices of the Brenva Péteret. But if it be admitted that the skill of the climber has not increased relatively to the difficulties grappled with, it would appear to follow necessarily that climbing is neither more nor less dangerous than formerly.

It is true that extraordinary progress has been made in the art of rock climbing, and that, consequently, any given rock climb is much easier now than thirty years since, but the essence of the sport lies, not in ascending a peak, but in struggling with and overcoming difficulties. The happy climber, like the aged Ulysses, is one who has "drunk delight of battle with his peers," and this delight is only attainable by assaulting cliffs which tax to their utmost limits the powers of the mountaineers engaged. This struggle involves the same risk, whether early climbers attacked what we now call easy rock, or whether we moderns attack formidable rock, or whether the ideal climber of the future assaults cliffs which we now regard as hopelessly inaccessible. Doubtless my difference with the great authorities referred to above is, in the main, due to a totally different view of the

raison d'être of mountaineering. Regarded as a sport, some danger is, and always must be, inherent in it; regarded as a means of exercise amongst noble scenery, for quasi-scientific pursuits, as the raw material for interesting papers, or for the purposes of brag and bounce, it has become as safe as the ascent of the Rigi or Pilatus was to the climbers of thirty years since. But these pursuits are not mountaineering in the sense in which the founders of the Alpine Club used the term, and they are not mountaineering in the sense in which the elect—a small, perchance even a dwindling body—use it now. To set one's utmost faculties, physical and mental, to fight some grim precipice, or force some gaunt, ice-clad gully, is work worthy of men; to toil up long slopes of screes behind a guide who can "lie in bed and picture every step of the way up with all the places for hand and foot," is work worthy of the fibreless contents of fashionable clothes, dumped with all their scents and ointments, starched linen and shiny boots, at Zermatt by the railway.

The true mountaineer is a wanderer, and by a wanderer I do not mean a man who expends his whole time in travelling to and fro in the mountains on the exact tracks of his predecessors—much as a bicyclist rushes along the turnpike roads of England—but I mean a man who loves to be where no human being has been before, who delights in gripping rocks that have previously never felt the touch of human fingers, or in hewing his way up ice-filled gullies whose grim shadows have been sacred to the mists and avalanches since "earth rose out of chaos." In other words, the true mountaineer is the man who attempts new ascents. Equally, whether he succeeds or fails, he delights in the fun and jollity of the struggle. The gaunt, bare slabs, the square, precipitous steps in the ridge, and the black, bulging ice of the gully, are the very breath of life to his being. I do not pretend to be able to analyse this feeling, still less to be able to make it clear to unbelievers. It must be felt to be understood, but it is potent to happiness and sends the blood tingling through the veins, destroying every trace of cynicism and striking at the very roots of pessimistic philosophy.

Our critics, curiously enough, repeat in substance Mr. Ruskin's original taunt that we regard the mountains as greased poles. I must confess that a natural and incurable denseness of

understanding does not enable me to feel the sting of this taunt. Putting aside the question of grease, which is offensive and too horrible for contemplation in its effects on knickerbockers—worse even than the structure-destroying edges and splinters of the Grépon ridge—I do not perceive the enormity or sin of climbing poles. At one time, I will confess, I took great delight in the art, and, so far as my experience extends, the taste is still widespread amongst English youth. It is possible, nay even probable, that much of the pleasure of mountaineering is derived from the actual physical effort and from the perfect state of health to which this effort brings its votaries, and, to this extent, may plausibly be alleged to be the mere sequence and development of the pole and tree climbing of our youth. The sting of the taunt is presumably meant to lurk in the implication that the climber is incapable of enjoying noble scenery; that, in the jargon of certain modern writers, he is a “mere gymnast.” But why should a man be assumed incapable of enjoying æsthetic pleasures because he is also capable of the physical and non-æsthetic pleasures of rock climbing?

A well-known mountaineer asserts that the fathers of the craft did not regard “the overcoming of physical obstacles by means of muscular exertion and skill” as “the chief pleasure of mountaineering.” But is this so? Can anyone read the great classic of mountaineering literature, *The Playground of Europe*, without feeling that the overcoming of these obstacles was a main factor of its author’s joy? Can anyone read *Peaks, Passes and Glaciers* and the earlier numbers of the *Alpine Journal* without feeling that the various writers gloried in the technique of their craft? Of course the skilful interpolation of “chief” gives an opening for much effective dialectic, but after all, what does it mean? How can a pleasure which is seated in health and jollity and the “spin of the blood” be measured and compared with a purely æsthetic feeling? It would appear difficult to argue that as a man cultivates and acquires muscular skill and knowledge of the mountains, he correspondingly dwarfs and impairs the æsthetic side of his nature. If so, we magnify the weak-kneed and the impotent, the lame, the halt, and the blind, and brand as false the Greek ideal of the perfect man. Doubtless a tendency in this direction may be detected in some modern

thought, but, like much else similarly enshrined, it has no ring of true metal. Those who are so completely masters of their environment that they can laugh and rollick on the ridges, free from all constraint of ropes or fear of danger, are far more able to appreciate the glories of the "eternal hills" than those who can only move in constant terror of their lives, amidst the endless chatter and rank tobacco smoke of unwashed guides.

The fact that a man enjoys scrambling up a steep rock in no way makes him insensible of all that is beautiful in Nature. The two sets of feelings are indeed wholly unconnected. A man may love climbing and care naught for mountain scenery; he may love the scenery and hate climbing; or he may be equally devoted to both. The presumption obviously is that those who are *most attracted by the mountains and most constantly return* to their fastnesses, are those who to the fullest extent possess both these sources of enjoyment—those who can combine the fun and frolic of a splendid sport with that indefinable delight which is induced by the lovely form, tone and colouring of the great ranges.

I am free to confess that I myself should still climb, even though there were no scenery to look at, even if the only climbing attainable were the dark and gruesome pot-holes of the Yorkshire dales. On the other hand, I should still wander among the upper snows, lured by the silent mists and the red blaze of the setting sun, even though physical or other infirmity, even though in after æons the sprouting of wings and other angelic appendages may have sunk all thought of climbing and cragsmanship in the whelming past.

It is frequently assumed, even by those who ought to know better, that if mountaineering involves danger of any sort, it should never be indulged in—at all events by such precious individuals as the members of the English Alpine Club. Before considering this most pernicious doctrine, it is well to remember, that though the perils of mountaineering may not have been wholly dissipated into space by the lightning-like flashes of the Badminton and All England series, yet, nevertheless, these perils are not very great. With a single exception, the foregoing pages contain an account of every difficulty I have experienced which has seemed to render disaster a possible contingency. As my

devotion to the sport began in 1871, and has continued with unabated vigour ever since, it will be evident that the climber's perils—in so far as a modest individual may regard himself as typical of the class—are extremely few and very rarely encountered. Such, however, as they have been, I would on no account have missed them. There is an educative and purifying power in danger that is to be found in no other school, and it is worth much for a man to know that he is not “clean gone to flesh pots and effeminacy.” It may be admitted that the mountains occasionally push things a trifle too far, and bring before their votaries a vision of the imminence of dissolution that the hangman himself with all his paraphernalia of scaffold, gallows and drop could hardly hope to excel. But grim and hopeless as the cliffs may sometimes look when ebbing twilight is chased by shrieking wind and snow and the furies are in mad hunt along the ridges, there is ever the feeling that brave companions and a constant spirit will cut the gathering web of peril, *forsan et hæc olim meminisse juvabit*.

The sense of independence and self-confidence induced by the great precipices and vast silent fields of snow is something wholly delightful. Every step is health, fun and frolic. The troubles and cares of life, together with the essential vulgarity of a plutocratic society, are left far below—foul miasmas that cling to the lowest bottoms of reeking valleys. Above, in the clear air and searching sunlight, we are afoot with the quiet gods, and men can know each other and themselves for what they are. No feeling can be more glorious than advancing to attack some gaunt precipitous wall with “comrades staunch as the founders of our race.” Nothing is more exhilarating than to know that the fingers of one hand can still be trusted with the lives of a party, and that the lower limbs are free from all trace of “knee-dissolving fear,” even though the friction of one hobnail on an outward shelving ledge alone checks the hurtling of the body through thin air, and of the soul (let us hope) to the realms above.

I am of course aware that it is an age which cares little for the more manly virtues, and which looks askance at any form of sport that can, by any stretch of extremest imagination, be regarded as dangerous: yet since we cannot all, for most obvious reasons, take our delight “wallowing in slimy spawn of lucre,”

something may surely be urged in favour of a sport that teaches, as no other teaches, endurance and mutual trust, and forces men occasionally to look death in its grimmest aspect frankly and squarely in the face. For though mountaineering is not, perhaps, more dangerous than other sports, it undoubtedly brings home to the mind a more stimulating sense of peril; a sense, indeed, that is out of all proportion to the actual risk. It is, for instance, quite impossible to look down the tremendous precipices of the Little Dru without feeling in each individual nerve the utter disintegration of everything human which a fall must involve; and the contingency of such a fall is frequently brought before the mind—indeed, throughout the ascent, constant and strenuous efforts are needed to avoid it. The love of wager, our religious teachers notwithstanding, is still inherent in the race, and one cannot find a higher stake—at all events in these materialistic days, when Old Nick will no longer lay sterling coin against the gamester's soul—than the continuity of the cervical vertebræ; and this is the stake that the mountaineer habitually and constantly wagers. *It is true the odds are all on his side*, but the off-chance excites honesty of thought and tests how far decay has penetrated the inner fibre. That mountaineering has a high educational value, few, who have the requisite knowledge to form a fair judgment, would deny. That it has its evil side I frankly admit. None can look down its gloomy death-roll without feeling that our sport demands a fearful price.

XVIII

THE ASCENT OF KANGCHENJUNGA

from

KANGCHENJUNGA THE UNTRODDEN PEAK¹

by CHARLES EVANS

Kangchenjunga, the mighty spur which dominates the Himalayas north of Darjeeling, was the natural successor to Everest in the line of peaks beckoning experienced mountaineers to add its name to those of the mighty summits conquered in the last few years. 28,146 feet above sea level, the mountain until 1955 resisted all efforts to conquer it from 1905 onwards when it was first attempted by a party under Aleister Crowley with tragic results. The mountain itself came to have an evil reputation for bad weather, heavy snowfall and ice-avalanches.

In 1955 the Alpine Club together with the Royal Geographical Society sponsored a large expedition of which the Duke of Edinburgh was the patron. The party under the leadership of Charles Evans was to consist of eight Europeans in addition to the leader and twenty-eight permanent Sherpas under Dawa Tenzing, plus local coolie labour.

At first some opposition to the expedition was made by the Sikkimese, who regard Kangchenjunga as a god and protector. This opposition was removed when a promise was made that the actual summit and its neighbourhood would be left undisturbed. The climbers were to ascend no farther than was necessary to ensure that it was possible to reach the summit. This promise was respected and the last few feet were left unclimbed.

In addition to the story of the last stages of the climb, given below, is included the final chapter of the above book which sums up the reasons for success not only on Kangchenjunga but in the great postwar climbs generally.



WHEN we began our journey down to Camp V, George Band and Joe Brown set about their preparations for the night. It was after four: the edge of the shadow cast by the cliffs of Kangchenjunga West was creeping near and soon would cut them off from the warmth of the sun, already feeble. They crawled into the tent, and George connected up the large oxygen cylinder that they were to share during the night; it was not quite full, but should last them about nine hours. Meanwhile, against the

¹ Published by Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1956.

back of the ledge, Joe lit the Primus and began to melt snow. They wanted to eat as much as possible, and particularly to drink, for hard breathing in dry air robs the body of moisture very quickly. They made orangeade from crystals, and followed it up with sweet tea. Supper consisted of asparagus soup from a packet, lambs' tongues from a tin, and mashed potato. Then they drank again, this time chocolate, drinking it slowly in order to keep it down. It was a meal which they really enjoyed, an unusual experience at high camps. While they ate, the sun was sinking behind Jannu, throwing great golden rays through rents in the cloud. Joe sat by the open tent-sleeve, watching, and took photograph after photograph as the colours changed. "It was terrific," he says. George, inside the tent, was taking out a partly exposed reel of film so as to have a full reel for the morrow. He found his fingers clumsy: they were slightly frost-bitten, all the tips blistered. They had lost feeling that morning at Camp V while he was wearing only one pair of tattered silk gloves; and not realising how cold it was he had worked for a moment too long. At eight o'clock, when it was time to get into the sleeping-bags, the question arose who should sleep on the outside, where the tent sagged over the ledge. Joe broke two matchsticks and offered them; George chose the shorter, and lost. They felt so precariously perched that they tied on the rope and George made it fast to a spike of rock on the slabs close to the tent. Outside, he took a last look round; there were two levels of cloud to be seen, the lower a layer of settled cumulus, the upper murky and thunderous. Threads of lightning flickered over the plains. On the mountain it was absolutely still.

As they lay side by side, fragments of snow kept skittering down the slope and bombarding the tent. Occasional eddies of wind rustled the canvas, and these, together with the pattering from above, suggested to George's anoxic, sleep-befuddled mind that new snow was falling; but luckily it was a fine night, and inside the tent they were reasonably warm. To cut down weight they had brought only their outer sleeping-bags, and inside them they wore every scrap of clothing they had, even their boots. George at this time, afraid that if he took off his boots they would be frozen hard, wore them continuously for three days and three nights.

Sleep did not come easily, kept off, perhaps, partly by excitement. Soon after turning on the oxygen they felt warmth flooding through their chilled limbs down to their toes. To George, the suck and swish of each breath against the soft rubber mask seemed like the surge and wash of waves on a dark sea-shore. He had come to expect, in the first few minutes after donning his mask at night, grotesque highly coloured dreams; but this night the colours were drab.

When the oxygen finished, soon after five o'clock, they woke at once. Balancing the Primus between them, they began melting snow, and in three hours had produced water enough to have two mugs of tea each and to fill a flask with lemonade for the coming day; they ate only some biscuits. At eight-fifteen they started. The tent was still in shade but the west side of the Gangway was lit by the sun, and as they climbed they bore to the left to meet it. At first George led. The snow was hard, and for a few steps he thought that they could climb in their crampons without cutting; then, remembering that on the way down they would be very tired, he began to cut steps.

We had studied this last part of the climb through binoculars from Base Camp, and although we had at one time proposed to climb the Gangway as far as the west ridge and follow that ridge towards the top, this plan had been discarded in favour of following a line of snow-patches and broken rocks which we had seen on the south-west face. Starting about 200 feet below the west col, this line sloped up across the face towards the foot of a snowy spur which ran up to join the west ridge between the summit and a cluster of prominent rock-pinnacles.

As they climbed step by step up the Gangway, under the great cliffs of its east wall, it was hard to know which snow-patch marked the start of their intended traverse. George lifted his mask to make himself heard and called, "Do you think that's it, Joe?" "Perhaps. Let's look." Neither was sure, and George cut up and round a steep corner. There was more snow and rock ahead, and still they could not see enough to be sure. For an hour George cut up snow and over ice-glazed rock. Then they rounded another corner and saw before them a sheer wall of brown rock about 200 feet high, broken only by successive lines of

overhang. It was, Joe says, "VS stuff"—"Very Severe"—and they retraced their steps to the Gangway.

The mistake had cost them an hour and a half, in time and in oxygen. They now shared the lead, and continued up the Gangway, making for its eastern fork, keeping to the right of a tall rock-pinnacle. They cut in zig-zags, wielding the axe one-handed; slash, slash, step; slash, slash, step; they moved quickly.

Above the fork of the Gangway the cliffs to their right grew less steep, and there, sparkling in the sun, they saw the snow-patches, which this time there was no mistaking; but above, in shade, there were still steep rocks through which they saw no obvious break. Turning off the Gangway, they found slabby rocks, and gullies and ledges covered with snow. To Joe it was natural to turn at once to the rocks; but some of the low walls were harder than they had looked and in places George preferred the snow. Soon they took off their crampons and tied them to their packs. They had taken off their canvas overboots the night before, and now, for the first time since Base Camp, their rubber soles gripped the bare rock. Presently they reached steeper rock, a 40-foot buttress, brown, rough and easy. Above it was snow with a slabby crust, which felt as if it might break away under them; it led to more rock, and here for safety Joe put in a peg to which to fasten the rope. He swung round a corner to the right; for a moment he was hanging from his hands, his feet dangling; then he entered a chimney in which there was ice, climbed it, and traversed to the right again across a slabby face. Here it was airy, but the holds, Joe says, were good: "A really nice position." When George followed, he thought that the hardest part was the move just above the ice-filled chimney, up a little slab where there were no holds except a crack on the left. The exposed traverse led to the foot of an ice-gully. It was 120 feet long, and steep, about 60°: as Joe cut up it, he could rest his side against the steps. They climbed it in two pitches; half-way, there was a small rocky nose which they used as a halting-place. Joe for the first time was beginning to feel tired, and George tried to summon up the energy to take over the lead; but it was clear that Joe was getting the more benefit from his oxygen, and they decided that he should continue. George belayed his rope round an axe stuck

between ice and rock while Joe slowly cut up the rest of the gully. There was little room on the stance and the belay was poor: it felt like a perch in mid-air above the Great Shelf and the Yalung. At the top of the gully the snow petered out between constricting rock walls and they climbed out with a twist of the body. They had reached the crest of the snowy spur which led to the west ridge above the cluster of pinnacles, and for the first time could see the rocks under the summit. The distance of the main ridge was only about 50 yards, the slope here of only about 30° ; they were tempted to stop cutting and to climb it in crampons, but thought it better to be cautious, and continued to cut steps, moving together, slowly. They had been going continuously for five hours, and George felt his throat parched and clots of phlegm sticking to the roof of his mouth. Once or twice, he saw that Joe's goggles were pushed up on his forehead, and called to warn him, but the sun did not seem bright, and the misty goggles were a continual nuisance; for half the day Joe's eyes went unprotected.

So far they had felt no wind; now, reaching the crest of the main ridge, they found a fresh breeze blowing from the northwest, carrying flurries of snow above their heads. On the very crest they found shelter in a small hollow, a natural balcony enclosed on three sides by a wall of ice about three feet high and a foot thick; there they sat down to eat; it was their first rest. The cluster of pinnacles was just below them; beyond it they saw Kangchenjunga West, and beyond that a layer of cloud. They could see far down the north side, and though it did not look as if the north ridge could be climbed straight up from the north col, it looked as if from the col the north face could be traversed, to reach the west ridge where they now sat. Looking back the way they had come, they saw rocks at the lower end of the snowy spur, then nothing until the Great Shelf. It was a glorious place, but they could not linger to enjoy it. Time was pressing. It was two o'clock, and they had only two hours' supply of oxygen left. George said that they must turn back by three or risk a night out. "In that case," Joe answered, "we've got to be there by three."

After ten minutes they started again. "From then on," Joe says, "it was a ridge like Crib Gôch—easy scrambling rocks—

with snow and ice on it; that was just in the hollows where you put your feet; everything you got hold of was clean, the rocks where they stuck out dry and clean." Ahead the slope of the ridge was gentle at first, then rose abruptly, a tower of brown and grey rock 60 feet high. They moved together for about a rope's-length at or near the very crest before taking to the south side of the ridge for a further rope's length. Joe, who was still in the lead, was using John Clegg's axe this day, his own having broken earlier in the expedition; it had a sling which he found convenient for dangling it from his wrist when using both hands on the rock; he also carried, tied to his pack, a small axe like a piton-hammer for use in very steep places. George, because of the clumsiness of his frost-bitten hands, found that it was very difficult to manage rope and axe, let alone grasp the rock.

The traverse brought them to a gully of rocks and snow which finished 60 feet up against a sheer wall; at that point there was a large block wedged in the gully, and George, when he came up, anchored himself while he examined the wall ahead. The rock was rough and dry, gold-brown in sunshine. There was more than one crack running up it; Joe picked the likeliest, one at the back of a recess; at its foot were some square-cut blocks, which he reached by a short traverse across snow-covered ledges. The place was exposed; below were the cliffs up to which they had looked earlier when they had lost the route on the Gangway; "If you came off the crack," Joe says, "you wouldn't have to bounce much before you were going down very steep rocks." He fixed a runner,* and started. The crack was one which low down he could have climbed with ease, but here he wondered for how long he would have the strength to hang by his hands, and he turned his oxygen to the full six litres a minute. Two moves brought him to a chock-stone to which he fastened a second runner; above, some blocks formed an overhang; though their edges offered a good grip, they looked insecure, and he preferred to jam his fists in the cracks at their sides; he pulled up and round the bulge, to the right.

George, watching, had no inkling of what lay beyond, till suddenly Joe, at the top of the wall, turned his head and shouted,

* Runner—a "running belay" made by threading the climber's rope through a ring fixed to the mountain.

"George, we're there." A few minutes later, George himself had climbed the crack. Where they stood, some huge flat slabs of grey rock made a platform; before them rose a cone of snow, about 20 feet away and a few feet higher than the place where they stood; it was the top.

A few feet to their right was another flat rock-table; it was on the south side of the top, and here they went to take photographs with the top as background. On the view, except to the north-east, where it was cut off by the top, they took a complete panorama. Sikkim and Darjeeling were hidden under a bubbling sea of cloud which flowed round the south ridge of the mountain and spread towards the plains. They could see Camps IV and II, black specks: the cloud-level was at about 20,000 feet. Far off, only the highest peaks stood above it, like rocky islands lapped by waves: Makalu and Chomolongo, Lhotse and Everest.

From the south ridge, Joe looked down the east face but could see only cloud; then he walked to the west ridge and made fast George's rope round his short axe stuck in the snow so that George could join him. They looked down the slabs of the north ridge and saw on one side the top of Bauer's spur, and on the other the grey snake of the Kangchenjunga glacier. Tibet was only 13 miles away, and beyond the savage outlines of the Twins and Nepal Peak they could see its rolling uplands, dry and dun-coloured, half hidden by cloud, only streaked with snow.

George says that a lot of people have asked him: "Wasn't there a great temptation to go those last few feet?"; and that the answer is no. "For one thing," he says, "I was too tired to want to take another step. But apart from that, I'm glad we left no footmark on the top." I think that we all felt the same. Had it not been for our promise, we should have gone to the top, without doubt; but as it was, keeping the promise cost us no regret. The gesture seemed fitting enough.

It was late, and cloud was coming up, and after fifteen minutes, at three o'clock, they started down, each taking with him a piece of rock, speckled grey and black gneiss, which later could be cut or broken into smaller pieces. For a moment they wondered if they should lower themselves down the highest crack

on a doubled rope; then they decided to climb down it. They did not find it so difficult as on the way up. Joe left there the sling round the chockstone, in case Norman Hardie and Tony Streather should want to make use of it. Their first stop after that was at the balcony above the cluster of pinnacles, where they ate some mint cake, and finished their lemon drink, leaving their flask on the ridge.

Near the bottom of the snowy spur Joe began to gasp, as if, he says, he was doing some really hard work: his oxygen was finished. He took off the set and dumped it on the snow. A short way below, in the gully which had led them up to the snow-ridge, George's also finished, and his set was dumped near the stance half-way up the gully, where Norman Hardie photographed it next day. When they went on, they were slower, and stopped often for short rests; not far above the Gangway they put on the crampons which for most of the day they had carried; they felt very tired.

They were now in shadow, the light of the sunset glowing on the crags above them, and when at last they reached the upper part of the Gangway it was beginning to grow dark. It was difficult to see the steps, and in places new steps had to be cut: on the way up they had cut their steps rather far apart. Once or twice they thought they heard a whistle or call from below, and Joe whistled in reply. It seemed much farther down the Gangway than up, and, Joe says, "We didn't see the tent till we were right on it. We never thought we weren't going to reach it, but we had begun to wonder just when." It was dark by now, seven o'clock; Norman Hardie and Tony Streather were *inside*, and the *Primus* was purring. "Did you make it?" They grunted in reply and sank down on the snow at the tent door. Never had they felt so thirsty.

* * *

CONCLUSION

IN the last few years, seven of the world's highest mountains have been climbed. The reasons are the accumulation of knowledge, both of climbing at great heights and of individual mountains, and the development of equipment. Today, we climb in down suits and light windproofs, wear well insulated

boots, sleep on air-mattresses in warm bags, and use oxygen sets both by day and by night; and when we think of the men of the early expeditions, in their tweed jackets and knee-length puttees, felt hats, scarves and shooting-boots, and remember that without oxygen sets they carried camps as high as our highest, and climbed to a height about equal to that of Kangchenjunga, we are filled with respect.

It is the use of oxygen which, above all, has made the difference. This has made it possible to live high, yet continue to climb with vigour; men are less dependent on their individual capacity to do with little oxygen; speed of climbing is increased, so that camps can be set farther apart and farther from the summit; Sherpas use oxygen to climb to the highest camps. It was the use of oxygen that made Everest possible; it played its part in Jean Franco's wonderful achievement on Makalu, when nine members of his expedition reached the summit; and on Kangchenjunga it made the final stages swifter and more sure.

Mountaineers have sometimes debated the rival merits of the large sponsored expedition, lavishly supplied, where the atmosphere is likely to be rather formal, and of the small, frugal expedition of three or four who know each other well. On Kangchenjunga it seemed to us that we had the best of both. Through the hard work and generosity of our helpers at home we started with everything that we thought we really needed; and long before we set up our camp at Pache's Grave we had become a group of close friends.

Our Sherpas were straight from the mountains. They had been chosen by Dawa Tenzing, and he had made few mistakes. They were the kind of men who carried for the first Everest expeditions, trapesing ragged and wild over the 19,000-foot Nangpa La to see what was happening at Rongbuk, much as the Ghunsa men had come trotting into our early camp by the ruined temple. They were men to whom it was important to see the work done. They were, by their standards, well paid, and they were given a small bonus for carrying to the highest camps; but what took them there was pride. Good Sherpas are proud men, and what they will not do for its own sake, or for yours, they will not do for money.

It would be naïve to suppose that they can never change.

Except those of the strongest character, it is unlikely that they can be proof against the great growth of Himalayan travel, and the penetration into the remotest places of caravans whose assumption is that it is money that matters. We are lucky to have enjoyed their friendship in days when they have not yet been much exposed to the chance of harm.

In the weather we were neither particularly lucky nor particularly unlucky. For the time of year, it was what was to be expected. In April and early May we had wind, and regular afternoon falls of snow. At a time when we much wanted fine weather we were storm-bound for two days, but were able to ride out the storm; and later, when the highest camp was occupied, we were lucky in having several successive fine days, days which, at that season, we have come almost to regard as normal, the days of relative stillness when in the high air the prevailing strong north-west wind is checked at the onset of the south-west monsoon.

In one matter we were wholly in the hands of fortune, and wholly fortunate. When we started, we could not be sure whether the form of the mountain was such that it could be climbed at all. Either there was a way up it, or there was not. As it turned out, there was; and we followed it, more and more captivated. It was easier to follow than we had expected, and, considering the reputation of Kangchenjunga, surprisingly secure. When snow conditions are favourable, there are only two places where risk is unavoidable: the first, under the ice-cliffs on the way to Camp I; the second, below Camp II, at the top of the Lower Icefall. The route, complex and full of variety, winds like a thread among difficulties and dangers from which it is itself largely free.

When every mountain over 26,000 feet has been climbed, there will still be in the Himalayas a host of big mountains whose easiest faces and ridges are likely to prove more difficult than the ways first found up the biggest of all; and perhaps the most thoroughly enjoyable sport will always be offered by those whose tops are below the level at which lack of oxygen becomes a burden. Yet it should never be thought that to climb high on one of the biggest mountains is mainly drudgery. The magnificence of such a giant at close quarters is indescribable, and

where the stress of wind, sun and frost is enhanced by the rarity of the air, the climber knows that he is at the boundary of the living world.

Twice more, from Rungneet, we saw the untrodden peak : once, in the fading light, indigo and dark red, and again, silvered by sunrise. It had lost nothing of its power to wake desire, though the invitation was no longer individual. Now the mountain seemed to embody the spell of all far places, of all the high snows and hidden valleys that are waiting.

XIX

A NIGHT ADVENTURE ON THE BRISTENSTOCK, 1857

from

PEAKS, PASSES AND GLACIERS¹
a series of excursions by members of the Alpine Club

Edited by JOHN BALL, M.R.I.A., F.L.S.

As a contrast to some of the heroic episodes from the accounts of large-scale mountaineering expeditions to the regions of eternal snow this story is offered of what was anticipated to be little more than an easy day's gentle climb from Amsteg up a 10,000 foot peak. In the event the climb proved somewhat more arduous than was anticipated.

The ascent itself included some laborious work involving both hands and feet and taking a short cut down a gully in their anxiety to save time, the two climbers, Mr. Hardy and Mr. Kennedy, not only miss their six o'clock dinner but losing their way find themselves confronted with a sheer wall some hundreds of feet high and quite impassable. Forced to climb back almost to the summit they have to face a night on the mountain perched precariously on the edge of a precipice and endure further mortifications before finally reaching safety.

The story is told by Mr. Kennedy in most realistic fashion and must surely remind readers of similar vicissitudes of fortune, though perhaps less hazardous, through succumbing to the fateful temptation of the short cut.



A FEW minutes after five o'clock, on a most lovely morning, we left the hotel in light marching order, unencumbered either with waistcoats or neckties, and carrying a knapsack containing but one bottle of wine and one lump of bread; for we intended thoroughly to enjoy our six o'clock dinner. Through thick pine forests, and over Alpine pastures, we passed rejoicing, occasionally catching glimpses of the bay of Uri, which, from its unrippled bosom, reflected many a cragged and woody headland; sometimes gazing down upon that highway of nations which, "like a wounded snake, dragged its slow length along," and in the deep valley beneath us threaded the narrow defile that leads to the Devil's Bridge and the St. Gotthard. As we now

¹ Published by Longmans, Brown, Green, Longmans and Roberts, London, 1859.

and then traced the sluggish course of some early *voiture* that crawled reluctantly upwards, we speculated upon the probability that its inmates were "doing" Switzerland *en grand seigneur*; and after the manner of our old friends, Brown, Jones and Robinson, with their eyes closed in peaceful slumber, were dreaming of the past rather than admiring the present. Far different, indeed, were our feelings; we both most thoroughly enjoyed our stroll, for hitherto our ascent appeared nothing more, and so rapidly sped the time that it seemed as if but a few minutes had elapsed when at half-past ten we emerged from the thick pine-wood shade upon the open space of the upper pastures. Here the genius of the spot welcomed our approach with his balmy and invigorating breath, which, richly laden as it was with the sweet perfume of the black orchis, that fragrant weather-glass of the Alps, heralded a day of summer beauty worthy to succeed the soft grandeur of the early morn. Here, too, the pink rhododendron, or alpine rose, blossomed profusely, sometimes grouped around the blighted and stunted fir-trunks, and sometimes scattered about some broken mass of moss-clad rock that the avalanche of a bygone age had hurled from its lofty resting-place down upon the pasturage below.

The prospect even here was most striking, and we repeatedly sat down upon some projecting crag lost in admiration of the scene. We could now look up to the head of the Maderaner Thal, where from amid the wild crags of the Clariden Grat came tumbling down the beautiful glacier of Hüfi; farther in the background arose the mighty mass of Tödi, clothed with dazzling snows, while close at our feet lay the fair little Bristen-See, as suggestive of peace and quiet as the bold forms that surrounded it were of the tumult and war of the elements. Hardy was completely fascinated, nor, indeed, was it otherwise with myself; but perhaps I was rather more impressed than he with the extreme value of time on these mountain excursions. Be that as it may, my companion had but little difficulty in persuading me to lie down with him on the pleasant sward, and there take our time in gazing to the utmost. The luxury was intense, although it cost us rather dear, as luxuries sometimes do.

Up from the valley came the sound of distant church bells, reminding us of home, even in scenes so different; and as we

indolently chatted on, with the warm bright sun gladdening our hearts, and the air though perfectly still yet fresh and clear, such a feeling of perfect calm and happiness came over us that we almost resented the suggestion made by an inexorable necessity, that we should be on the move. "Come, come, this won't do, this is not the way to get to the top of a mountain; we must push on a little faster." Thus was poetry displaced by prose, and our contemplative mood succeeded by a stern reality.

We now approached a glacier embosomed in a vast hollow on the northern side of the mountain, and leaving this to the left crossed the moraine which, running in a north-westerly direction, has been deposited at some period when the glacier was more extensive than it now is. We then began quietly to climb the rocky ridge by which the glacier is bounded on its western side; but soon both hands and feet were brought into play; the ridge was steep, the ground was loose and treacherous, and precipitous were the rocks, both to the right and left; crag after crag was surmounted, yet ever and anon we lingered to gather specimens of the Alpine Flora, to feast our eyes on the distant peaks as they gradually rose into view, or to examine the strange and varied composition of the rocks which perpetually arrested our attention. And as usual in these mountain climbs, each headland as it cut sharply against the clear blue sky immediately above us gave hope that the summit was in view; but again and again were these deceptive peaks reached, surmounted, and left far below us, while again and again another and yet another succeeded.

We had now had about three hours of this style of travelling, and were crossing frequent patches of snow, when, finding that it was already three o'clock, we began to get a little anxious as to time. "It is getting late, Hardy; it would be better to give it up and return, for we have many an hour's work behind us." "No," was Hardy's reply; "after coming so far, we'll never give in now; see, there is the top! Another twenty minutes and we are there." I yielded, although sundry doubts crossed my mind in respect of the twenty minutes. "I don't like to give in any more than you, but it is a question of time, not of fatigue, and darkness in the pine woods does not afford the pleasantest travelling in the world; and there are softer pillows than the roots of a fir-tree."

At length the summit was gained; time, just 3.53. We sat down, cooled our wine in the snow, revelled in the contemplation of the glorious panorama, and, heedless of time or of the work that was yet to be accomplished, were most thoroughly happy. We finished the wine and nearly finished the bread—there was but a small piece left, about as big as a man's hand, which Hardy was about to leave behind, but "Put it in your pocket," I suggested, "it may yet be wanted."

And now hurrah for the descent! "I say, Kennedy," said my companion, "it's twenty minutes past four already; we must set to work in earnest. Don't you think that we had better try a different line of country? Look, down that gully we could get on capitally!" "Humph! yes, it's all very well as far as we can see; but it's rather foolhardy to try a new route at this time of day." "Don't make bad puns on my name," was the reply; "there's no time for that—now, what are we to do?" We decided on trying the new route. I cannot say whether we were bold and self-reliant, or rash and self-conceited; we have thought of the matter since, and have never yet arrived at a satisfactory solution.

At 4.20 p.m. we commenced descending the northern face of the mountain, taking a course directly towards the small glacier far below us, that lies on a shelf in the face of the mountain turned towards the Maderaner Thal. We started at a rapid pace. At first, and perhaps for half an hour, there were traces of what with a laudable stretch of imagination we facetiously called a path; but which was in reality the bed, either of a torrent or of an avalanche. This indistinct appearance however soon vanished, and we descended by sheer climbing, generally one at a time, while the other held the poles, and frequently we were brought to a complete standstill. It was at one of these stoppages, when I happened to be first, and was sorely puzzled how to make any progress, that I heard Hardy's voice above me, talking in a sanguine strain of the supper that was to reward our exertions. I did not contradict him, although unpleasant misgivings passed through my mind as to the chance of the promise being realised. The careful reader will doubtless have perceived that our anticipated six o'clock dinner was now postponed to a certain, or rather uncertain, indefinite supper; while if, as I suppose, he be

also an experienced mountaineer, he knows the value of an evening meal after a hard day's work. Bearing this in mind, he will the more readily sympathise with us in our subsequent privations. At length, after a descent of two hours, during the whole of which our energies, both mental and bodily, were taxed to the utmost, we appeared to be not more than 600 feet above the upper part of the glacier where it was separated from the rocks by the usual *bergschrund*. Many of my readers have, doubtless, crossed the Strahleck, and remember the famed descent of the Wall at the head of the Finsteraar Glacier on that glorious pass. Let them imagine that Wall, variously estimated as it is at from 500 to 800 feet in height, about five times magnified in height, and greatly increased in difficulty, and they will have a just idea of this face of the Bristenstock. We were at this moment apparently in the position of the traveller at the top of the Strahleck Wall, but with this essential difference, that we had already made a descent of some 2,000 feet, and that the portion beneath us was quite impracticable. It had been our intention to reach the glacier below us, and then to cross it diagonally in a north-westerly direction, so as to reach the lower extremity of the western lateral moraine. From the spot where we were standing, however, the wall of rock appeared to go sheer down to the ice; there was no mode of descent that we could possibly discover, and on neither hand could we discern foothold even for a chamois. I saw that there was nothing to be done where we were, and that it was impossible to remain much longer clinging to the slippery ledges of these precipitous rocks. I briefly informed my companion of the real state of the case, and told him there was but one course open to us—to return as quickly as possible to the top of the mountain. He expostulated; representing the impossibility of clambering again up the face of the precipice where we had frequently dropped from one ledge to another, and urged besides that there was no chance, if we returned to the top, of getting back to the inn that night. Of course I knew that our prospect of bed and supper for that night had disappeared, and that if we did come down the mountain, it would be in a way that would leave us no further occasion for those luxuries; difficult as the ascent might be, it was the only course that remained to us; and when Hardy

at last saw the serious nature of our position, he at once cordially agreed to face the disagreeable alternative that was before us.

With that we began our work in earnest; our council of war did not, I believe, occupy more than two minutes; we set our faces to the rocks, and, during those rare opportunities in which they gave us any freedom of motion, we pushed on faster than at any former part of our expedition. So steep was the climb that at times I stood on a narrow ledge with my fingers in clefts of the rock, and with my breast pressed against its face that I might not fall backwards, while Hardy climbed up and stood upon my shoulders, so as just to reach some projecting fragment, and after drawing himself up, would lie down, and stretching out his hand to me, help me to place myself alongside of him. Just before reaching the top, we bore to the west, so as to cross the ridge by which we had ascended, about a hundred feet below the summit. But the sun had now set, and our present object was to descend rapidly and thus get as low as possible before it became quite dark, so as to diminish the cold that we should experience in the night bivouac, which we both knew was inevitable. We again neglected our old friend the ridge by which we had mounted, because it was not steep enough, and was necessarily exposed to the blast, and we rapidly descended the west face of the mountain, which immediately overhangs the St. Gotthard Road. When about five hundred feet from the summit, there was not sufficient light for further progress, and, indeed, had we succeeded in continuing our advance, we should as it proved have found no spot whatever whereon we could have stretched our limbs. As it was, we selected a ledge running north and south, probably the only available locality on this face of the mountain, about four feet and a half wide, and eight long, bounded on the east by the rock, which rose perpendicularly, and terminating on the western side by the cliffs which fell from it precipitously towards the valley. On this exposed side, we built a wall about eighteen inches high, as a guard against a roll over in the night, and also as some protection from the wind. We levelled our bed to the best of our ability with nice and smooth stones, selecting some particularly fine specimens for our pillows. Hardy wickedly reminded me of the disparaging tone in which I had talked some hours earlier of the roots of fir-trees,

regarded as pillows, and asked whether I should wish for one now? Of course all I could say was that "Tastes might differ, but that on the present occasion I preferred stone pillows." Hardy produced the lump of bread which he had fortunately saved; a portion of it was reserved for breakfast on the morrow, the remainder we shared for supper; and we eagerly drank from a streamlet that trickled close at hand. Our frugal meal was soon despatched, but the preparations necessary for completing our bed had occupied some time, and it was now dark, so we agreed to turn in for the night.

We were obliged to use the greatest care in this operation. First one made himself comfortable, then the other cautiously placed himself alongside and endeavoured to do likewise. Although we agreed that, in order to avoid the risk of falling over, we would not both sleep with our back to the precipice, yet ever and anon as we leaned a little against our fragile wall of stones, one or two of them would become displaced and go bounding away into the valley some thousands of feet below. Thus we reposed, locked in each other's arms like the babes in the wood, whom the robins covered with leaves; only, in the present case, there were no babes, and no wood, and no robins, and no leaves. For a long time we were sleepless, and yet not inclined to talk; the stars were shining brilliantly in the black vault above, and never, I think, in all our rambles, did grandeur and sublimity make themselves so impressively felt. We were fully aware of the difficulty of our position, and of the imperative necessity for coolness and self-possession, should fog or bad weather come on. Not for one moment, however, did either of us, I believe, feel doubtful; and it was probably this self-reliance, this hardly acknowledged fact that our energies would be taxed to the utmost, and that our nerves must be fully strung to meet and overcome every obstacle, that added so greatly to the unusually deep solemnity of that hour. Perhaps neither of us had ever before felt so immediately under the protection of a Higher Power as we did on that night. We were alone upon the mountain, far away from the haunts of men, and it seemed as if we two, with the eyes of Heaven looking down upon us, must have been in some especial way under the care of Providence. It may well be that both of us then realised, more than ever before, that

genuine trust in an Omnipotent Power which, while confiding the ultimate results to Him, yet leads its possessor to the distinct recognition of the necessity of bringing into play his own activity, his own energy, and even his own self-reliance. Strange too as it may appear to many, notwithstanding all the discomforts of our couch, we yet, throughout that night, experienced a certain sensation of enjoyment and satisfaction. At frequent intervals we rose by mutual consent, stamped our feet upon our stony bed, for we did not dare to move six inches in any direction, and beat our arms after the fashion of London cabmen in cold weather. At one period of the night, when we both felt more than usually cold, I remember that Hardy quietly related to me, how, prior to his departure from England, certain advice had been given him by a most valued member of his family. It appears that on one or two occasions he had suffered rather severely from rheumatic fever, and his respected relative had therefore rightly cautioned him to avoid carefully all exposure to night air, and every risk calculated to encourage another attack. "What," said Hardy to me, "would the dear old lady think if she could see me now?" It is, however, a remarkable fact that since that night Hardy has enjoyed more robust health than ever, and laughs to scorn all idea of an attack from his ancient enemy. Dare we go so far as to recommend all who suffer from rheumatic fever to try a course of Bristenstock treatment? Let the reader determine.

At length the long wished for morning broke; with the first dawn we were stirring, but were obliged to stamp about our narrow platform for some twenty minutes, in order to restore circulation, or we should not have had sufficient steadiness to have continued our descent in safety. We had not the slightest appetite, but compelled ourselves to eat the last morsel of bread, while, unfortunately, we had no means of moistening our lips, for the water that had on the previous evening trickled past, was now frozen, and in such cases a lump of ice in the mouth seems to give little or no relief.

Now, one might have supposed that the lesson of yesterday would have sufficed, and that we should have taken care to have followed the ridge by which we had ascended. Not so, however; instead of returning to the track which we knew, half wilfully,

half carelessly, we suffered ourselves to be tempted by apparently easy places, and thus to leave the ridge at every step still farther and farther to the right. And so we continued our course down the western face, the whole of the descent being exceedingly arduous, although, perhaps, in consequence of our being somewhat exhausted, the difficulties might have assumed an appearance of greater magnitude. Our principal discomfort was want of water, which we did not find until about six o'clock.

Two hours passed away, and we seemed to be nearing the grass slopes, and to be getting into easy ground. Too soon, however, we were undeceived, for our ridge terminated suddenly in sheer precipices, at the very edge of which we pulled up, and gazed over at the River Reuss, foaming in his rocky bed some 5,000 feet below.

The Bristenstock is made up of thirty or forty of these main ridges, each of which appears to break off near its summit, into as many more minor ones, and these again are similarly subdivided; the whole group of rugged ridges of ragged rock, irregularly radiating from the craggy crest of the mountain. Not more than two or three of these are practicable, and, as it afterwards turned out, we had got upon one which was about the eighth main ridge in a westerly direction from that which we had intended to follow.

We now made a rather troublesome descent down the northern side of the ridge into a watercourse, where we were very glad to get our morning draught, and then ascending to the next ridge essayed a fresh descent along its edge, but were again cut off. After three similar attempts, and, so far as we can judge, about noon, Hardy suggested that our best course would be simply to cross ridge after ridge, without attempting to descend until we came to our own original track. The plan was forthwith put in execution, and just after we had surmounted the one nearest to us, and were examining the next succeeding one, we most happily descried thereon a small goat track, which seemed tolerably easy. We made for this at once, and found to our no small joy that it was an excellent footpath, excellent indeed, compared with the abrupt rocks and steep gullies among which we had now been for some sixteen or eighteen hours constantly clambering. At the same time it was but a goat track,

and even here we could not allow our eyes to wander from the small spot whereon at each step we were to plant our feet. We were thus conducted along the edge of the precipices, turning the ridges in the most satisfactory style; and finally, about 2.30 p.m., congratulated ourselves upon at last treading upon the much-desired grass slopes.

Now that the excitement of difficulty was ended, we became conscious of hunger and fatigue, and we did not much relish the long walk over ground that on the previous day had afforded so much enjoyment. However, there was nothing for it but to push on, for we were still 5,000 or 6,000 feet above the level of the sea, and some hours from the hotel; we therefore made way as fast as possible towards some distant châteaux, in the hope of there recruiting our somewhat exhausted energies with a little bread and milk. But this was a day of disappointments, and when we reached the huts they were utterly empty. We were the more vexed because (as we imagined) we had left our direct route, a conjecture, however, in which we were mistaken, for after stumbling about rather at random among the alders and brushwood, we met with two small goatherds, who directed us back again to the châteaux, behind which was a good beaten path leading straight through the pinewoods to Amsteg.

XX

CONQUEST OF THE WEISSHORN

from

HOURS OF EXERCISE IN THE ALPS¹

by JOHN TYNDALL

John Tyndall, one of the foremost scientists of his time, was a contemporary of Whymper and originally won fame for his conquest of the Weisshorn, in company with the guide Bennen, in the year 1861. The mountain was at that time regarded as being second only to the Matterhorn and to use Tyndall's own words he looked upon it as "the noblest of the Alps."

Tyndall was also a writer of great charm and it is probable that he derived as much pleasure from writing about his climbs as he did from the physical exertion they involved and the subsequent taste of victory. Some of his major climbs are collected in "Hours of Exercise in the Alps," which cover his wanderings in the years 1860-70. This account of his ascent of the Weisshorn is taken from the above book and the reader will enjoy not only the thrill of the assault but the beauty and realism of Tyndall's own account.



ON Friday, August 16th, I rose at 4.30; the eastern heaven was hot with the glow of the rising sun, and against it were drawn the mountain outlines. At 5.30 I bade good-bye to the excellent little auberge of the Bel Alp,* and went straight down the mountain to Brieg, took the diligence to Visp, and engaged a porter immediately to Randa. I had sent Bennen thither to inspect the Weisshorn. On my arrival I learned that he had made the necessary reconnaissance, and entertained hopes of our being able to gain the top.

This noble mountain, which is fourteen thousand eight hundred feet high, had been tried on various occasions and from different sides by brave and competent climbers, but all efforts had been hitherto unavailing.

Previous to quitting Randa to assail this formidable peak I

¹Published by Longmans, Green, London, 1899.

* Now a substantial and well-known hotel.—L. C. T.

had two pairs of rugs sewed together so as to form two sacks. These and other coverlets, together with our wine and provisions, were sent on in advance of us. At 1 p.m. on August 18th, Bennen, Wenger and myself quitted the hotel, and were soon zigzagging among the pines of the opposite mountain. Wenger had been the guide of my friend Forster, and had showed himself so active and handy on the Strahleck that I commissioned Bennen to engage him. During the previous night I had been very unwell, and as I climbed the slope I suffered from intense thirst. Water seemed powerless to quench the desire for drink. We reached a chalet, and at our request a smart young Senner caught up a pail, and soon returned with it full of delicious milk. The effect of the milk was astonishing. It seemed to lubricate every atom of my body, and to exhilarate with its fragrance my brain.

Two hours' additional climbing brought us to our bivouac, a ledge of rock which jutted from the mountain-side, and formed an overhanging roof. On removing the stones from beneath the ledge, a space of comparatively dry clay was laid bare. This was to be my bed, and to soften it Wenger considerably stirred it up with his axe. This position was excellent, for lying upon my left side I commanded the whole range of Monte Rosa, from the Mischabel to the Breithorn. We were on the edge of an amphitheatre. Beyond the Schallenchbach was the stately Mettelhorn. A row of eminences swept round to the right linked by lofty ridges of cliffs, which embraced the Schallenberg glacier. They formed, however, only a spur of the vaster Weiss-horn, the cone of which was not visible from our dormitory. In company with Bennen I afterwards skirted the mountain until the whole colossal pyramid stood facing us. When I first looked at it my hopes sank, but both of us gathered confidence from a more lengthened gaze. The mountain is a pyramid with three faces, the intersections of which form three sharp edges or *arêtes*. The end of the eastern ridge was nearest to us, and on it our attention was principally fixed. We finally decided on the route to be pursued next morning, and with a chastened hope in both our breasts we returned to our shelter.

Water was our first necessity: it seemed everywhere, but there was none to drink. It was locked to solidity in the ice and snow.

The sound of it came booming up from the Vispbach, as it broke into foam or rolled its boulders over its waterworn bed; and the swish of many a minor streamlet mingled with the muffled roar of the large one. Bennen set out in search of the precious liquid, and after a long absence returned with a jug and pan full. At our meal, Wenger, who is a man rich in small expedients, turned the section of a cheese towards the flame of our pine fire; it fizzed and blistered and turned viscous, and, the toasted surface being removed, was consumed with relish by us all. The sunset had been unspeakably grand, steeping the zenith in violet, and flooding the base of the heavens with crimson light. Immediately opposite to us rose the Mischabel, with its two peaks, the Grubenhorn and the Täschor, each barely under 15,000 feet in height. Next came the Alphubel, with its flattened crown of snow; then the Allaleinhorn and Rympfischhorn; then the Cima di Jazzi; next the mass of Monte Rosa, flooded with light from bottom to top. The face of the Lyskamm turned towards us was for the most part shaded, but here and there its projecting portions jutted forth red hot as the light fell upon them. The "Twins" were most singularly illuminated; across the waist of each of them was drawn a black bar, produced by the shadow of a corner of the Breithorn, while their bases and crowns were exposed to the crimson light. Over the rugged face of the Breithorn itself the light fell as if in splashes, igniting its glaciers and swathing its black crags in a layer of transparent red. The Mettelhorn was cold, so was the entire range governed by the Weisshorn, while the glaciers they embraced lay grey and ghastly in the twilight shade.

The sunlight lingered, while up the arch of the opposite heavens the moon, within one day of being full, seemed hastening to our aid. She finally appeared exactly behind the peak of the Rympfischhorn, the cone of the mountain being projected for a short time as a triangle on the lunar disc. Only for a short time, however; the silver sphere soon cleared the mountain, and bore away through the tinted sky. The motion was quite visible, and resembled that of a vast balloon. As the day approached its end the scene assumed the most sublime aspect. All the lower portions of the mountains were deeply shaded, while the loftiest peaks, ranged upon a semicircle, were fully exposed to the sinking

sun. They seemed pyramids of solid fire, while here and there long stretches of crimson light drawn over the higher snow-fields linked the summits together. An intensely illuminated geranium flower seems to swim in its own colour, which apparently surrounds the petals like a layer, and defeats by its lustre any attempt of the eye to seize upon the sharp outline of the leaves. A similar effect was here observed upon the mountains; the glory did not seem to come from them alone, but seemed also effluent from the air around them. As the evening advanced, the eastern heavens low down assumed a deep purple hue, above which, and blending with it by infinitesimal gradations, was a belt of red, and over this again zones of orange and violet. I walked round the corner of the mountain at sunset, and found the western sky glowing with a more transparent crimson than that which overspread the east. The crown of the Weisshorn was imbedded in this magnificent light. After sunset the purple of the east changed to a deep neutral tint, and against the faded red which spread above it the sun-forsaken mountains laid their cold and ghastly heads. The ruddy colour vanished more and more; the stars strengthened in lustre, until finally the moon and they held undisputed possession of the sky.

My face was turned towards the moon until it became so chilled that I was forced to protect it by a light handkerchief. The power of blinding the eyes is ascribed to the moonbeams, but the real mischief is that produced by radiations from the eyes into clear space, and the inflammation consequent upon the chill. As the cold increased I was fain to squeeze myself more and more underneath the ledge, so as to lessen the space of sky against which my body could radiate. Nothing could be more solemn than the night. Up from the valley came the low thunder of the Vispbach. Over the Dom flashed in succession the stars of Orion, until finally the entire constellation hung aloft. Higher up in heaven was the moon, and her beams as they fell upon the snowfields and pyramids were sent back in silvery lustre by some, while others remained a dead white. These, as the earth twirled round, came duly in for their share of the glory. The Twins caught it at length and retained it long, shining with a pure spiritual radiance, while the moon continued above the hills.

At twelve o'clock I looked at my watch, and a second time at

2 a.m. The moon was then just touching the crest of the Schallenberg, and we were threatened with the withdrawal of her light. This soon occurred. We rose at 2.15 a.m., consumed our coffee, and had to wait idly for the dawn. A faint illumination at length overspread the sky, and with this promise of the coming day we quitted our bivouac at 3.30 a.m. No cloud was to be seen; as far as the weather was concerned we were sure to have fair play. We rounded the shingly shoulder of the mountain to the edge of a snowfield, but before entering upon it I disburthened myself of my strong shooting jacket, leaving it on the mountainside. The sunbeams and my own exertion would, I knew, keep me only too warm during the day. We crossed the snow, cut our way through a piece of entangled glacier, reached the Bergschrund, and passed it without a rope. We ascended the frozen snow of the couloir by steps, but soon diverged from it to the rocks at our right, and mounted them to the end of the eastern *arête* of the mountain.

A snow saddle separated us from the higher rocks. With our staff-pikes at one side of the saddle, we pass by steps cut upon the other. We find the rocks hewn into fantastic turrets and obelisks, while the loose chips of this sculpture are strewn confusedly upon the ridge. Amid these we cautiously pick our way, winding round the towers or scaling them amain. The work was heavy from the first, the bending, twisting, reaching and drawing up calling upon all the muscles of the frame. After two hours of this work we halted, and, looking back, saw two moving objects on the glacier below us. At first we took them to be chamois, but they were men. The leader carried an axe, and his companion a knapsack and an alpenstock. They followed our traces, losing them apparently now and then, and waiting to recover them. Our expedition had put Randa in a state of excitement, and some of its best climbers had urged Bennen to take them with him. This he did not deem necessary, and now here were two of them determined to try the thing on their own account, and perhaps to dispute with us the honour of the enterprise. On this point, however, our uneasiness was small.

Resuming our gymnastics, the rocky staircase led us to the flat summit of a tower, where we found ourselves cut off from a similar tower by a deep gap bitten into the mountain. The rope

was here our refuge. Bennen coiled it round his waist; we let him down along the surface of the rock, until he fixed himself on a ledge, where he could lend me a helping hand. I followed him, and Wenger followed me. By a kind of screw motion we twisted ourselves round the opposite tower, and reached the ridge behind it. Work of this kind, however, is not to be performed by the day, and, with a view of sparing our strength, we quitted the ridge and endeavoured to get along the southern slope of the pyramid. The mountain was scarred by long couloirs, filled with clear hard ice. The cutting of steps across these couloirs proved to be so tedious and fatiguing that I urged Bennen to abandon them and try the ridge once more. We regained it and worked along it as before. Here and there upon the northern side the snow was folded over, and we worked slowly upward along the cornice snow. The ridge became gradually narrower, and the precipices on each side more sheer. We reached the end of one of its subdivisions, and found ourselves separated from the next rocks by a gap about twenty yards across. The ridge was here narrowed to a mere wall, which, however, as rock, would present no serious difficulty. But upon the wall of rock was placed a second wall of snow, which dwindled to a pure knife-edge at the top. It was white, of very fine grain, and a little moist. How to pass this snow catenary I knew not, for I did not think a human foot could trust itself upon so frail a support. Bennen's practical sagacity, however, came into play. He tried the snow by squeezing it with his foot, and to my astonishment began to cross it. Even after the pressure of his feet the space he had to stand on did not exceed a hand-breadth. I followed him, exactly as a boy walking along a horizontal pole, with toes turned outwards. Right and left the precipices were appalling. We reached the opposite rock, and an earnest smile rippled over Bennen's countenance as he turned towards me. He knew that he had done a daring thing, though not a presumptuous one. "Had the snow," he said, "been less perfect, I should not have thought of attempting it; but I knew after I had set my foot upon the ridge that we might pass without fear."

It is quite surprising what a number of things the simple observation made by Faraday in 1846 enables us to explain. Bennen's instinctive act is justified by theory. The snow was fine

in grain, pure and moist. When pressed, the attachments of its granules were innumerable, and their perfect cleanness enabled them to freeze together with a maximum energy. It was this freezing which gave the mass its sustaining power.

Two fragments of ordinary table ice brought carefully together freeze and cement themselves at their place of junction; or if two pieces floating in water be brought together, they instantly freeze, and by laying hold of either of them gently you can drag the other after it through the water. Imagine such points of attachment distributed in great numbers through a mass of snow. The substance becomes thereby a semi-solid instead of a mass of powder. My guide, however, unaided by any theory, did a thing from which I should have shrunk, though backed by all the theories in the world.

After this we found the rocks on the ridge so shaken that it required the greatest caution to avoid bringing them down upon us. With all our care, moreover, we sometimes dislodged vast masses, which leaped upon the slope adjacent, loosened others by their shock, these again others, until finally a whole flight of them would escape, setting the mountain in a roar as they whizzed and thundered along its side to the snowfields 4,000 feet below us. The day was hot, the work hard, and our bodies were drained of their liquids as by a Turkish bath. To make good our loss we halted at intervals where the melted snow formed liquid veins, and quenched our thirst. A bottle of champagne, poured sparingly into our goblets over a little snow, furnished Wenger and myself with many a refreshing draught. Bennen feared his eyes, and would not touch champagne. We, however, did not find halting good; for at every pause the muscles became set, and some minutes were necessary to render them again elastic. But for both mind and body the discipline was grand. There is scarcely a position possible to a human being which, at one time or another during the day, I was not forced to assume. The fingers, wrist and forearm were my main reliance, and as a mechanical instrument the human hand appeared to me this day to be a miracle of constructive art.

For the most part the summit was hidden from us, but on reaching the successive eminences it came frequently into view. After three hours spent on the *arête*—about five hours, that is,

subsequent to starting—we saw the summit over another minor summit, which gave it an illusive proximity. “You have now good hopes,” I remarked, turning to Bennen. “I do not allow myself to entertain the idea of failure,” he replied. Well, six hours passed on the ridge, each of which put in its inexorable claim to the due amount of mechanical work; and at the end of this time we found ourselves apparently no nearer to the summit than when Bennen’s hopes cropped out in confidence. I looked anxiously at my guide as he fixed his weary eyes upon the distant peak. There was no confidence in his expression; still I do not believe that either of us entertained for a moment the thought of giving in. Wenger complained of his lungs, and Bennen counselled him several times to remain behind; but this the Oberland man refused to do. At the commencement of a day’s work one often feels anxious, if not timid; but when the work is very hard we become callous and sometimes stupefied by the incessant knocking about. This was my case at present, and I kept watch lest my indifference should become carelessness. I repeatedly supposed a case where a sudden effort might be required of me, and felt all through that I had a fair residue of strength to fall back upon should such a call be made. This conclusion was sometimes tested by a spurt; flinging myself suddenly from rock to rock, I proved my condition by experiment instead of relying on surmise. An eminence in the ridge which cut off the view of the summit was now the object of our exertions. We reached it; but how hopelessly distant did the summit appear! Bennen laid his face upon his axe for a moment; a kind of sickly despair was in his eye as he turned to me, remarking, “*Lieber Herr, die Spitze ist noch sehr weit oben.*”

Lest the desire to gratify me should urge him beyond the bounds of prudence, I told my guide that he must not persist upon my account; that I should cheerfully return with him the moment he thought it no longer safe to proceed. He replied that, though weary, he felt quite sure of himself, and asked for some food. He had it, and a gulp of wine, which mightily refreshed him. Looking at the mountain with a firmer eye, he exclaimed, “*Herr! wir müssen ihn haben,*” and his voice, as he spoke, rang like steel within my heart. I thought of Englishmen in battle, of the qualities which had made them famous: it was mainly the

quality of not knowing when to yield—of fighting for duty even after they had ceased to be animated by hope. Such thoughts helped to lift me over the rocks. Another eminence now fronted us, behind which, how far we knew not, the summit lay. We scaled this height, and above us, but clearly within reach, a silvery pyramid projected itself against the blue sky. I was assured ten times over by my companions that it was the highest point before I ventured to stake my faith upon the assertion. I feared that it also might take rank with the illusions which had so often beset our ascent, and I shrank from the consequent moral shock. A huge prism of granite, or granite gneiss, terminated the *arête*, and from it a knife-edge of pure white snow ran up to a little point. We passed along the edge, reached that point, and instantly swept with our eyes the whole range of the horizon. We stood upon the crown of the redoubtable Weisshorn.

The long-pent feelings of my two companions found vent in a wild and reiterated cheer. Bennen shook his arms in the air and shouted as a Valaisian, while Wenger raised the shriller yell of the Oberland. We looked downwards along the ridge, and far below, perched on one of its crags, could discern the two Randa men. Again and again the roar of triumph was sent down to them. They had accomplished but a small portion of the ridge, and soon after our success they wended their way homewards. They came, willing enough, no doubt, to publish our failure had we failed; but we found out afterwards that they had been equally strenuous in announcing our success; they had seen us, they affirmed, like three flies upon the summit of the mountain. Both men had to endure a little persecution for the truth's sake, for nobody in Randa would believe that the Weisshorn could be scaled, and least of all by a man who for two days previously had been the object of Philomène the waitress's constant pity, on account of the incompetence of his stomach to accept all that she offered for its acceptance. The energy of conviction with which the men gave their evidence had, however, proved conclusive to the most sceptical before we arrived.

Bennen wished to leave some outward and visible sign of our success on the summit. He deplored having no suitable flag; but as a substitute for such it was proposed that he should use the

handle of one of our axes as a flagstaff, and surmount it by a red pocket-handkerchief. This was done, and for some time subsequently the extempore banner was seen flapping in the wind. To his extreme delight, it was shown to Bennen himself three days afterwards by my friend Mr. Francis Galton, from the Riffelberg hotel.

Every Swiss climber is acquainted with the Weissshorn. I have long regarded it as the noblest of all the Alps, and most other travellers share this opinion. The impression it produces is in some measure due to the comparative isolation with which it juts into the heavens. It is not masked by other mountains, and all around the Alps its final pyramid is in view. Conversely, the Weissshorn commands a vast range of prospect. Neither Bennen nor myself had ever seen anything at all equal to it. The day, moreover, was perfect; not a cloud was to be seen; and the gauzy haze of the distant air, though sufficient to soften the outlines and enhance the colouring of the mountains, was far too thin to obscure them. Over the peaks and through the valleys the sunbeams poured, unimpeded save by the mountains themselves, which sent their shadows in bars of darkness through the illuminated air. I had never before witnessed a scene which affected me like this one. I opened my notebook to make a few observations, but soon relinquished the attempt. There was something incongruous, if not profane, in allowing the scientific faculty to interfere where silent worship seemed the "reasonable service."

We had been ten hours climbing from our bivouac to the summit, and it was now necessary that we should clear the mountain before the close of day. Our muscles were loose and numbed, and, unless extremely urged, declined all energetic tension: the thought of our success, however, ran like a kind of wine through our fibres and helped us down. We once fancied the descent would be rapid, but it was far from being so. As in ascending, Bennen took the lead; he slowly cleared each crag, paused till I joined him, I pausing till Wenger joined me, and thus one or other of us was always in motion. Our leader showed a preference for the snow, while I held on to the rocks, where my hands could assist my feet. Our muscles were sorely tried by the twisting round the splintered turrets of the *arête*, but a long,

long stretch of the ridge must be passed before we could venture to swerve from it. We were roused from our stupefaction at times by the roar of the stones which we loosed from the ridge and sent leaping down the mountain. Soon after recrossing the snow catenary already mentioned we quitted the ridge to get obliquely along the slope of the pyramid. The face of it was scarred by couloirs, of which the deeper and narrower ones were filled with ice, while the others acted as highways for the rocks quarried by the weathering above. Steps must be cut in the ice, but the swing of the axe is very different now from what it was in the morning. Bennen's blows descended with the deliberateness of a man whose fire is half-quenched; still they fell with sufficient power, and the needful cavities were formed. We retraced our morning steps over some of the ice-slopes. No word of warning was uttered here as we ascended, but now Bennen's admonitions were frequent and emphatic—"Take care not to slip." I imagined, however, that even if a man slipped he would be able to arrest his descent; but Bennen's response when I stated this opinion was very prompt—"No! it would be utterly impossible. If it were snow you might do it, but it is pure ice, and if you fall you will lose your senses before you can use your axe." I suppose he was right. At length we turned directly downwards, and worked along one of the ridges which lie in the line of steepest fall. We first dropped cautiously from ledge to ledge. At one place Bennen clung for a considerable time to a face of rock, casting out feelers of leg and arm, and desiring me to stand still. I did not understand the difficulty, for the rock, though steep, was by no means vertical. I fastened myself on to it, Bennen being on a ledge below, waiting to receive me. The spot on which he stood was a little rounded protuberance sufficient to afford him footing, but over which the slightest momentum would have carried him. He knew this, and hence his caution. Soon after this we quitted our ridge and dropped into a couloir to the left of it. It was dark, and damp with trickling water. Here we disencumbered ourselves of the rope, and found our speed greatly augmented. In some places the rocks were worn to a powder, along which we shot by glissades. We swerved again to the left, crossed a ridge, and got into another and drier couloir. The last one was dangerous, as the water

exerted a constant sapping action upon the rocks. From our new position we could hear the clatter of stones descending the gully we had just forsaken. Wenger, who had brought up the rear during the day, is now sent to the front; he has not Bennen's power, but his legs are long and his descent rapid. He scents out the way, which becomes more and more difficult. He pauses, observes, dodges, but finally comes to a dead stop on the summit of a precipice, which sweeps like a rampart round the mountain. We moved to the left, and after a long *détour* succeeded in rounding the precipice.

Another half-hour brings us to the brow of a second precipice, which is scooped out along its centre so as to cause the brow to overhang. Chagrin was in Bennen's face: he turned his eyes upwards, and I feared mortally that he was about to propose a re-ascend of the *arête*. It was very questionable whether our muscles could have responded to such a demand. While we stood pondering here, a deep and confused roar attracted our attention. From a point near the summit of the Weisshorn, a rock had been discharged down a dry couloir, raising a cloud of dust at each bump against the mountain. A hundred similar ones were immediately in motion, while the spaces between the larger masses were filled by an innumerable flight of smaller stones. Each of them shook its quantum of dust in the air, until finally the avalanche was enveloped in a cloud. The clatter was stunning, for the collisions were incessant. Black masses of rock emerged here and there from the cloud, and sped through the air like flying fiends. Their motion was not one of translation merely, but they whizzed and vibrated in their flight as if urged by wings. The echoes resounded from side to side, from the Schallenberg to the Weisshorn and back, until finally, after many a deep-sounding thud in the snow, the whole troop came to rest at the bottom of the mountain. This stone avalanche was one of the most extraordinary things I had ever witnessed, and in connection with it I would draw the attention of future climbers of the Weisshorn to the danger which would infallibly beset any attempt to ascend it from this side, except by one of its *arêtes*. At any moment the mountainside may be raked by a fire as deadly as that of cannon.

After due deliberation we moved along the precipice westward, I fearing that each step forward but plunged us deeper into

difficulty. At one place, however, the precipice bevelled off to a steep incline of smooth rock, along which ran a crack, wide enough to admit the fingers, and sloping obliquely down to the lower glacier. Each in succession gripped the rock and shifted his body sideways along the crack until he came near enough to the glacier to reach it by a rough glissade. We passed swiftly along the glacier, sometimes running, and, on steeper slopes, sliding, until we were pulled up for the third time by a precipice which seemed even worse than either of the others. It was quite sheer, and as far as I could see right or left altogether hopeless. To my surprise, both men turned without hesitation to the right. I felt desperately blank, but I could notice no expression of dismay in the countenance of either of my companions. They inspected the moraine matter over which we walked, and at length one of them exclaimed, "Da sind die Spuren," lengthening his strides at the same moment. We looked over the brink at intervals, and at length discovered what appeared to be a mere streak of clay on the face of the precipice. On this streak we found footing. It was by no means easy, but to hard-pushed men it was a deliverance. The streak vanished, and we must get down the rock. This fortunately was rough, so that by pressing the hands against its rounded protuberances, and sticking the boot-nails against its projecting crystals, we let ourselves gradually down. A deep cleft separated the glacier from the precipice; this was crossed, and we were free, being clearly placed beyond the last bastion of the mountain.

XXI

DISASTER ON MONT BLANC

from

"THE MANCHESTER GUARDIAN"

December 1956/January 1957

Just before Christmas, 1956, two young men, Jean Vincendon of Paris and François Henri of Brussels, ignoring the advice of local guides, set off from Chamonix to climb Mont Blanc, via the Col de la Brenva. On their return journey they found their route barred by ice and snow and they were marooned on the mountain in the most hazardous circumstances.

Down in Chamonix there was a marked reluctance among the guides to risk further loss of life in rescuing men who had not heeded the warnings given. There was considerable delay before rescue parties were organised but soon after the guides set out the French Air Force conceived the bold plan of attempting a rescue by helicopter.

Helicopters had not previously been used for such purposes on Mont Blanc due to treacherous weather conditions and the initial attempts involved the crashing of one of the helicopters and the addition of a number of men to the original two awaiting rescue. Although those who were landed, either voluntarily or involuntarily, were able to reach Vincendon and Henri, owing to the enfeebled condition of these two men they were unable to do other than provide food and get them into the very slight shelter of the crashed helicopter.

Subsequently the rescuers themselves were saved but unfortunately the original climbers had to be abandoned. The following despatches from "The Manchester Guardian" give a most realistic account of the tragedy and drama enacted on Mont Blanc in the closing days of 1956 and the early days of the New Year. This same newspaper reported on March 21st, 1957, that the bodies of Vincendon and Henri were retrieved and brought down to Chamonix on the previous day.



CHAMONIX, DECEMBER 30

FIVE skilled and wary climbers, led by the redoubtable Lionel Terray (a member of the Annapurna expedition), climbed into an empty téléphérique this afternoon and left for the Aiguille du Midi. Their departure from the deserted station was the climax of a sombre week-end; for they were going to the rescue of two young climbers, who have been stranded for eight days high on

Mont Blanc and whose fate has troubled consciences, aroused controversies, and provided a dark background for the new year festivities at Chamonix.

The stranded men are Jean Vincendon (23), of Paris, and François Henri (22), of Brussels. They set off from Chamonix over a week ago, against the advice of the local guides, to make an attempt on Mont Blanc, by way of the Col de la Brenva. But on their way down (nobody knows yet whether they reached the top) they apparently moved too close beneath the flank of Mont Maudit, and found their way blocked by ice and fresh snow. The weather changed, there was more snow, and by Wednesday night it was realised that they were stranded there at about nine thousand feet.

Most of the Chamonix guides soon declared that the task of getting them down was not one for them. They had warned the two men not to attempt the climb. Conditions were extremely dangerous, and they saw no reason why they should risk their own lives in helping the foolhardy. Their point of view found many supporters in Chamonix, on the whole a hard-headed sort of town. The last climbing season was a bad one for accidents, and people here are understandably antipathetic to rashness on the mountains (though Vincendon and Henri are both able climbers with excellent equipment). "If they ever get down from there," the barman in one of the hotels said this morning, shaking a cocktail with precision, "they deserve a month in gaol." He was speaking for a good many of his fellow-citizens, by no means addicted to the romance of the high places.

Supplies Dropped

An alternative was a rescue by air. Helicopters have been used in mountain rescues elsewhere, though never on Mont Blanc itself, and the Air Force conceived the audacious plan of landing one on the Col du Dôme, at about 12,800 feet. It has been done before, but the present wintry and changeable weather makes it a risky project. A helicopter was sent up, hovered above the climbers, and dropped food, clothing and a tent. It also dropped a message telling the men to make their way, if they could, towards the Col du Dôme. Smoke grenades were dropped to illustrate the route for them, and a reconnaissance was made

of the col, which seemed to be (if the weather was suitable) in reasonable condition for a landing.

This was on Friday. Yesterday the weather began to worsen; but in the afternoon the helicopter took off again to see if the climbers had acted upon the message, or if they were already too exhausted. When it returned to the little airfield at Le Fayet, in the valley below Chamonix, its pilot smiled through the "Perspex" of his cockpit and gave the thumbs up sign to the small, anxious crowd waiting on the field. The climbers were still alive, and had climbed, according to instructions, to the Grand Plateau at about 12,000 feet. On the following day, if all was well, the rescue attempt would be made.

But this morning things went wrong. Mont Blanc was impenetrably enshrouded in cloud. From the look-out at Brevent we could see no higher than half-way up the Glacier des Bossoms and there was not a glimpse of the Grand Plateau or the Col du Dôme. The helicopter landing was clearly impossible; and the climbers were left up there in worsening weather, with food for two or perhaps three days, and with powers of endurance that must now be weakening. This is not the Himalaya and they were not prepared for long stays at high altitudes and in such conditions.

Chamonix this morning, though apparently as gay and lively as ever, was therefore a place of underlying emotions and reproaches. One man told me the reluctant guides were "criminals, no less." Another, looking at the veiled mountains above us, said they were "men, like the rest of us, not angels." The holiday crowds throng the ski-lift or stroll, all oblivious, arm in arm among the tourists' shops, but there were anxious faces in the bars where the professionals gather, and to anyone concerned with the affair, or interested in the moralities of adventure, there was tragedy in the air. It was a town of two layers: one had its eye on the souvenir ash-trays, the other on the Grand Plateau.

Two professional guides, honouring an old tradition, broke the impact. One was the great Terray, the other was a beginner in this hard profession. When they defied the opinion of their colleagues and volunteered to make the climb they were joined by three amateurs, and after lunch they walked pale-faced to the

téléférique, carrying their skis and climbing gear. If the weather clears to-night, and if the stranded men are still alive to-morrow, it is possible that the helicopters can do the job after all; in the meantime, the rescue climbers are to-night at the Aiguille du Midi, prepared for four days on the mountain. Only a handful of people waved them good-bye at the cold and empty station, and the téléphérique set off in sad silence, swaying its lonely way up the mountainside.

CHAMONIX, JANUARY 1

An air of almost comical topsy-turviness has overtaken events on Mont Blanc, where two young mountaineers have been stranded for nine days at about 12,000 feet. On Sunday the only rescuers on the mountain were five skilled climbers led by the celebrated Lionel Terray. To-day there are at least twenty people somewhere up there in the mist; a helicopter lies wrecked on the Grand Plateau; and men in nearly every degree of helplessness litter the slopes of the mountain.

There is a very real possibility, though, that this slapstick spectacle may develop into grave tragedy. The weather is grim, the mountain is scoured by avalanches, and the two original mountaineers, Jean Vincendon, of Paris, and François Henri, of Brussels, are to-night by no means the most popular men in Chamonix.

It was only yesterday that this great climbing centre, prodded by Terray's example, first devoted its energy to the rescue of the two men. Most of the professional guides of the place had earlier declined to make the attempt; they had warned Vincendon and Henri against making their climb, and they saw no reason why they should risk their own lives, too. By yesterday afternoon, though, conscience had apparently overcome logic. Terray with his climbers were on their way to the Grand Plateau, where the two men are; a string of six Swiss and two French climbers was following them, equipped with a radio transmitter; and the guides have at last decided to send a team of professionals.

Daring Plan

At the same time the French Air Force, waiting for good weather, cherished a daring plan to land two helicopters on the

Dôme du Gouter, at about 12,800 feet, from where six instructors from the Army Mountain School at Chamonix would descend with full rescue equipment to the plateau. Helicopters have already played an invaluable part in dropping supplies and instructions to the stranded men, and the crews were ready and eager to make the attempt.

Alas, when the weather broke briefly yesterday and the first helicopter took off, disaster at once overtook it. Its pilot circled low over the Grand Plateau, intending to drop there if possible two of the best Mountain School's instructors, to act as a sort of advance guard for the rescue team. As he did so the aircraft was apparently caught by a sudden gust of wind, and crashed. It is considered a total loss. Six men thus spent New Year's Eve crouching beneath its wings, a circumstance which has led the French newspapers to some poignant comment about champagne and bosoms of families.

Nevertheless, a second helicopter bravely set off for the mountain, and succeeded in landing on the Dôme du Gouter. In a series of ferry flights, it dropped six more instructors who promptly set off for the plateau dragging their equipment behind them on runners. The idea was that they should either take Vincendon and Henri back to the Dôme, to be picked up by helicopter, or else shepherd them to one of the mountain refuges.

Not Injured

So the situation rests this evening, complicated by a certain confusion of information. Judging by reports reaching the airfield, everybody on the mountain has been at one of the refuge huts except the original unfortunates, who are still in the lee of the helicopter. They are presumably too exhausted to move elsewhere, though apparently not injured; and this will be their tenth night on the mountain, at temperatures estimated to be as low as minus 30° Centigrade.

A third helicopter has been summoned, and to-morrow (if the weather clears) still another sortie will be made to the Dôme du Gouter. Meanwhile the indomitable Terray, the best hope of all, has sent back most of the Swiss climbers, has taken their radio set, and is approaching the plateau,

To-night, though, the weather is if anything worse than before. It is snowing, and not a star or a summit is to be seen. Conditions on the mountain are exceedingly difficult and dangerous, the chances of avalanches are serious, and Vincendon and Henri, in spite of the misery of their position, have forfeited a good deal of sympathy. As one of the local papers said acidly this morning, two "foolhardy and inexperienced mountaineers" have placed the lives of twenty men in jeopardy; and, as the newspaper prudently adds, a Sikorsky helicopter costs 120 million francs.

CHAMONIX, JANUARY 2

Sure enough, a comedy of errors on Mont Blanc is progressing inexorably towards tragedy and to-night there seems only a slimmest chance of rescuing the two young climbers, Jean Vincendon, of Paris, and François Henri, of Brussels, who have been stranded on the Grand Plateau for the past eleven days.

The rescue team, led by the well-known guide Lionel Terray, has returned frustrated to Chamonix. The men dropped by helicopter, either by accident or by intent, are safely in the refuge of Vallot high above the plateau at 13,200 feet. But the two stranded men are about to spend their twelfth night at 12,000 feet. They are exhausted and severely frost-bitten, one so badly that he cannot even feed himself; and they are lying all alone in their sleeping bags in the cabin of a wrecked helicopter.

The awesome thing is that they have already been reached, there in their ghastly eyrie, by several well-equipped and highly-trained mountaineers. Two instructors from the French Army Mountain School were in the helicopter which crashed on the Grand Plateau on Monday. Four others reached the Grand Plateau from the Dôme du Gouter, where a second helicopter had landed them. But there was no possibility, so the men say, of moving Henri and Vincendon to safety. Neither of them could walk.

The two pilots of the helicopter had to be looked after. The weather was bad. It would need, according to the instructors, fifteen men to drag the two climbers to safety on stretchers. As there were only eight fit men there on the plateau, they gave Vincendon and Henri what comfort they could, placed their

sleeping bags inside the helicopter, left them food and medicines, and climbed away to a refuge of their own. There has perhaps never been, in all the history of mountaineering, a more poignant parting.

There are now ten men in the refuge (two other instructors went directly there from the helicopter which landed at the Dôme du Gouter). They are probably safe enough, with food for several days, medicines, radio communication with Chamonix, and a good chance that they can be taken off by helicopter as soon as the weather clears. There will be some troubled consciences in Chamonix, though, if Henri and Vincendon do not survive. It was not for several days that anything was done from here about attempting their rescue.

Terray is quoted to-day as saying that the normal route to the Grand Plateau, by way of Les Grands Mulets, was not unduly difficult until recent snowfalls—which seems to imply that the skilled guides of Chamonix could well have rescued the two men if they had started early enough. It is hard to escape the suspicion that if this had been some valley in the country of the Sherpas, Henri and Vincendon would be safe in Chamonix to-night.

The Last Hope

Some of the rescue attempts seem to have had a trace of the slipshod about them. Even Terray failed, according to some reports, because nearly all the party's matches were in the pockets of the three men who lagged behind. The helicopter pilots who crashed on the Grand Plateau have no mountain clothing, and are therefore suffering from frost-bite (one of them also had the misfortune to fall into a crevasse on his way to the refuge: it was his baptism in mountaineering). The landing of the instructors at the Dôme du Gouter, if not too late, was evidently too little.

Recriminations there will certainly be—against the rash young climbers, against the reluctant guides, perhaps against the instructors: but there remains a flicker of hope. The indefatigable Air Force has acquired two jet helicopters, which are able to conserve their power better at high altitudes, and if the weather improves—it has been rather better to-day—they may

still be able to snatch Henri and Vincendon from the plateau. Or perhaps, if more instructors can be landed at the Dôme, a rescue can still be made from there. But time is running frighteningly short. The two young men in their sleeping bags, frozen and infinitely lonely, the one painfully feeding the other, must be very near death to-night.

PARIS, JANUARY 2

Most newspaper readers in France have been principally concerned during the last three days with the fate of the two young Alpinists, Vincendon and Henri, stranded on Mont Blanc.

Apart from the human drama the case has aroused comment on the grave risks and large expenditure that rash Alpinists may impose on others. In most cases of rescue the guides who participate take bigger risks than in a normal climb and yet, it is stated, in less than half the cases do the guides in France receive any fees at all for such work.

In this particular case the rescue team took 36 hours to cover a distance which normally requires only an hour and a half. The cost of the attempted rescue has already been enormous. The lost helicopter was worth £120,000 and the flying costs £16 an hour. And France is already short of helicopters for service in Algeria. Colonel Lacroix, director of the helicopter section of the General Staff, has stated :

"When men are in a dangerous situation we should do our best to get them out of it. It is a simple question of humanity. But to put it brutally, for the two men who have been imprudent we are taking the risk of being short in Africa of material needed to save a greater number whose situation is not of their own choosing and who are showing great courage."

The question is raised whether climbers in France should not be compelled, as in Switzerland, to insure themselves to cover the cost of the help they may possibly need.

AIGUILLE DU MIDI, JANUARY 3

Everything was quiet on Mont Blanc this evening. This morning helicopters were creeping up the face of the mountain

and hovering above the Dôme du Gouter, and the whirring of their blades filled the valley as they took off from the big skating rink at Chamonix. Now everything is still and silent in the sunshine. If you look through binoculars, though, you can see on the high expanse of the Grand Plateau, at 12,000 feet, the black wreckage of a helicopter; and somewhere among it there lie the bodies of Jean Vincendon and François Henri, the two young climbers who found themselves stranded there twelve days ago. Nobody knows for certain whether they are alive or dead, but they must be as near death as men can be; and all attempts to rescue them have been abandoned.

There is nobody else high on the mountain. The crew of the crashed helicopter have been removed by air from the refuge hut of Vallot, together with six instructors from the French Army Mountain School at Chamonix. The only rescue attempt by land, that led by Lionel Terray, was defeated by the weather. The guides of Chamonix never set out. The instructors who reached the two men earlier this week, but were unable to remove them, say that even then one of them was only just breathing, and the other desperately frost-bitten from the waist down. Experts say that it would take thirty men to drag Vincendon and Henri to safety, and then only if the weather (which has been beautiful to-day) remains friendly.

Terray's Expulsion

The Grand Plateau certainly looks inexpressibly cold and lonely, in spite of the sunshine. Here on the Aiguille du Midi, at about 11,700 feet, the icy wind is unbearable; higher up it is said to have been blowing at about 100 m.p.h. and the temperature goes down to minus 35° Centigrade. "Nobody could survive thirteen nights in that," say the experts. "If they are still alive now they can hardly live much longer."

All the same, if a peace of requiem reigns this evening on the mountain, down in Chamonix a vicious controversy is raging. It revolves in particular around the bold person of Lionel Terray. He has long been a member, perhaps the most distinguished, of the Chamonix organisation of professional guides; but when the organisation let it be known that it would make no attempt to rescue the climbers (the risks were too great), he defied their

opinion and made a determined attempt with a team of amateurs to reach the Grand Plateau. For this initiative he has now been expelled from the organisation.

The guides, in a statement published to-day, explain their views at length (just as, in any Chamonix café this morning, you could hardly escape some hasty and protracted argument of justification). The conditions were too awful for a rescue, they said; many of the guides had wives and children to think of; a rescue attempt was not a publicity stunt; it was up to them to decide whether the risks were acceptable; and it was to be hoped (the statement ended severely) that in future the enterprise of Alpinists would be marked by a little more prudence and modesty.

"Commercialism"

Terray, on the other hand, is outspoken in his criticism of the guides. This afternoon he told me that the organisation had become entirely commercial; and he no longer wanted to be associated with it anyway. *Its committee lacked authority or decision, and had an "inferiority complex" about the mountain in winter, and the reputation of the corps of guides had been declining steadily for years. It was nonsense to say that conditions had been bad on the mountain all the time; if a prompt rescue attempt had been launched up the route of the Grands Mulets, before the recent storms, the two men would have been saved. Of course Henri and Vincendon had been rash, but that was no reason to abandon them.*

One senses a certain tackiness in the response of the climbing community to these strictures. There are dark references to publicity hunters and show-offs, and veiled comments on exploits in the Himalaya and the Andes which incite rash youths to follies of emulation. A man remarked to me this morning that Terray had been guilty of "moral disobedience"; and by way of contrast he threw a hand in the direction of an elderly and respected guide, dressed in a nice tweed sports coat, who was sipping his aperitif with propriety in a corner of the café.

But talk as they may, one cannot help sniffing in the air of Chamonix some failure of leadership, some avoidance of responsibility. It is always easy for an outsider to criticise, but

anybody can think of ways in which a rescue might have been tried: appearing, perhaps, even very dangerous, but surely worth attempting. Not everybody is stuffy or selfish in Chamonix and Terray has plenty of allies, arguing the hours away in the slushy snow outside the post office.

While I was talking to Terray to-day, an expert spelcologist (a doctor) rang him up to say that he had offered his services to the air force. He wanted to be lowered in a helicopter to a point about fifteen feet above the stranded men, and he would climb down a rope-ladder to help them. This would avoid the danger of landing a helicopter in the snow on the Grand Plateau. He was rebuffed. He knew nothing about mountains, he was told, and could therefore not be of use.

Even now, nobody really knows whether the two men are dead. Perhaps they are still waiting up there in the snow. It would take 30 men to move them, say the experts. Very well then, say the critics outside the post office, send 30 men up now while the weather is good—I'll go! "Oh, but the weather might change, or the helicopters might crash, and anyway they are so far gone that it is not worth it." Everybody now agrees that the task of moving Henri and Vincendon was beyond the powers of the six brave and courageous climbers who did reach them; but nobody has yet satisfactorily explained why more men were not dropped at the Dôme du Gouter (within easy reach of their refuge) while the weather was good enough. "The responsibility was too great," say the experts, ordering a cognac.

Anyway, it is all over now. Terray will no doubt survive without his membership card; the guides will prosper in the bosoms of their families; the holidaymakers will still come jaunting up the télésérrique to the Aiguille du Midi, to gaze blankly through their binoculars at the Grand Plateau. The wreckage of the helicopter, so they say, will be left there until the spring; so there will be something new to look at.

XXII

EVEREST CONQUERED

from

HIGH ADVENTURE¹

by EDMUND HILLARY

On May 29th, 1953, two men, Edmund Hillary and Tenzing, made mountaineering history which thrilled the world when they became the first to set foot upon the summit of Everest. For well over thirty years it had become the prize most coveted by mountaineers and in their mind's eye all the world were watching the men giving battle to the mountain.

As with all major climbs the ultimate success of the victorious expedition owed much to its predecessors. In the case of Everest the mountain had been the subject of many large-scale expeditions since 1921 when it was first surveyed, to be tackled in earnest the following year. Hillary himself took part in Eric Shipton's famous expedition in 1951 which although unsuccessful in reaching the summit did discover what was thought to be a feasible route from the south.

Hopes of being able to make a further attempt the following year via the new route were dashed when it was heard that the Swiss had been granted permission to organise an expedition for 1952. Nevertheless the Joint Himalayan Committee of the Royal Geographical Society and the Alpine Club decided to go ahead with plans and obtained permission to attempt the summit in 1953 and as evidence of their determination organised a training expedition to the Himalayas in 1952. Two Swiss attempts in 1952 failed and it was left to the British to try their luck. Contrary to expectations the leadership fell not to Shipton as anticipated but to John Hunt, who organised the attack via the South Col with infectious enthusiasm and meticulous organisation. Evans and Bourdillon, the first assault team, reached the South Summit but were defeated in their final objective by shortage of oxygen and exhaustion. How Hillary and Tenzing subsequently made their triumphal climb is told in the story which follows.



At 6.30 a.m. we crawled slowly out of the tent and stood on our little ledge. Already the upper part of the mountain was bathed in sunlight. It looked warm and inviting, but our ledge was dark and cold. We lifted our oxygen on to our backs and slowly connected up the tubes to our face-masks. My 30-lb. load seemed to crush me downwards and stifled all enthusiasm, but when I

¹Published by Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1955.

turned on the oxygen and breathed it deeply, the burden seemed to lighten and the old urge to get to grips with the mountain came back. We strapped on our crampons and tied on our nylon rope; grasped our ice-axes and were ready to go.

I looked at the way ahead. From our tent very steep slopes covered with deep powder snow led up to a prominent snow shoulder on the South-east ridge about a hundred feet above our heads. The slopes were in the shade and breaking trail was going to be cold work. Still a little worried about my boots, I asked Tenzing to lead off. Always willing to do his share, and more than his share if necessary, Tenzing scrambled past me and tackled the slope. With powerful thrusts of his legs he forced his way up in knee-deep snow. I gathered in the rope and followed along behind him.

We were climbing out over the tremendous South face of the mountain, and below us snow chutes and rock ribs plummeted thousands of feet down to the Western Cwm. Starting in the morning straight on to exposed climbing is always trying for the nerves, and this was no exception. In imagination I could feel my heavy load dragging me backwards down the great slopes below; I seemed clumsy and unstable and my breath was hurried and uneven. But Tenzing was pursuing an irresistible course up the slope, and I didn't have time to think too much. My muscles soon warmed up to their work, my nerves relaxed, and I dropped into the old climbing rhythm and followed steadily up his tracks. As we gained a little height we moved into the rays of the sun, and although we could feel no appreciable warmth, we were greatly encouraged by its presence. Taking no rests, Tenzing ploughed his way up through the deep snow and led out on to the snow shoulder. We were now at a height of 28,000 feet. Towering directly above our heads was the South Summit—steep and formidable. And to the right were the enormous cornices of the summit ridge. We still had a long way to go.

Ahead of us the ridge was sharp and narrow, but rose at an easy angle. I felt warm and strong now, so took over the lead. First I investigated the ridge with my ice-axe. On the sharp crest of the ridge and on the right-hand side loose powder snow was lying dangerously over hard ice. Any attempt to climb on

this would only produce an unpleasant slide down towards the Kangshung glacier. But the left-hand slope was better—it was still rather steep, but it had a firm surface of wind-blown powder snow into which our crampons would bite readily.

Taking every care, I moved along on to the left-hand side of the ridge. Everything seemed perfectly safe. With increased confidence, I took another step. Next moment I was almost thrown off balance as the wind-crust suddenly gave way and I sank through it up to my knee. It took me a little while to regain my breath. Then I gradually pulled my leg out of the hole. I was almost upright again when the wind-crust under the other foot gave way and I sank back with both legs enveloped in soft, loose snow to the knees. It was the mountaineer's curse—breakable crust. I forced my way along. Sometimes for a few careful steps I was on the surface, but usually the crust would break at the critical moment and I'd be up to my knees again. Though it was tiring and exasperating work, I felt I had plenty of strength in reserve. For half an hour I continued on in this uncomfortable fashion, with the violent balancing movements I was having to make completely destroying rhythm and breath. It was a great relief when the snow conditions improved and I was able to stay on the surface. I still kept down on the steep slopes on the left of the ridge, but plunged ahead and climbed steadily upwards. I came over a small crest and saw in front of me a tiny hollow on the ridge. And in this hollow lay two oxygen bottles almost completely covered with snow. It was Evans' and Bourdillon's dump.

I rushed forward into the hollow and knelt beside them. Wrenching one of the bottles out of its frozen bed I wiped the snow off its dial—it showed a thousand-pounds pressure, it was nearly a third full of oxygen. I checked the other—it was the same. This was great news. It meant that the oxygen we were carrying on our backs only had to get us back to these bottles instead of right down to the South Col. It gave us more than another hour of endurance. I explained this to Tenzing through my oxygen mask. I don't think he understood, but he realised I was pleased about something and nodded enthusiastically.

I led off again. I knew there was plenty of hard work ahead and Tenzing could save his energies for that. The ridge climbed

on upwards rather more steeply now, and then broadened out and shot up at a sharp angle to the foot of the enormous slope running up to the South Summit. I crossed over on to the right-hand side of the ridge and found the snow was firm there. I started chipping a long line of steps up to the foot of the great slope. Here we stamped out a platform for ourselves and I checked our oxygen. Everything seemed to be going well. I had a little more oxygen left than Tenzing, which meant I was obtaining a slightly lower flow rate from my set, but it wasn't enough to matter and there was nothing I could do about it, anyway.

Ahead of us was a really formidable problem, and I stood in my steps and looked at it. Rising from our feet was an enormous slope slanting steeply down on to the precipitous East face of Everest and climbing up with appalling steepness to the South Summit of the mountain 400 feet above us. The left-hand side of the slope was a most unsavoury mixture of steep loose rock and snow, which my New Zealand training immediately regarded with grave suspicion, but which in actual fact the rock-climbing Britons, Evans and Bourdillon, had ascended in much trepidation when on the first assault. The only other route was up the snow itself and still faintly discernible here and there were traces of the track made by the first assault party, who had come down it in preference to their line of ascent up the rocks. The snow route it was for us! There looked to be some tough work ahead, and as Tenzing had been taking it easy for a while I hard-heartedly waved him through. With his first six steps I realised that the work was going to be much harder than I had thought. His first two steps were on top of the snow, the third was up to his ankles and by the sixth he was up to his hips. But almost lying against the steep slope, he drove himself onwards, ploughing a track directly upwards. Even following in his steps was hard work, for the loose snow refused to pack into safe steps. After a long and valiant spell he was plainly in need of a rest, so I took over.

Immediately I realised that we were on dangerous ground. On this very steep slope the snow was soft and deep with little coherence. My ice-axe shaft sank into it without any support and we had no sort of a belay. The only factor that made it at all possible to progress was a thin crust of frozen snow which tied

the whole slope together. But this crust was a poor support. I was forcing my way upwards, plunging deep steps through it, when suddenly with a dull breaking noise an area of crust all around me about six feet in diameter broke off into large sections and slid with me back through three or four steps. And then I stopped; but the crust, gathering speed, slithered on out of sight. It was a nasty shock. My whole training told me that the slope was exceedingly dangerous, but at the same time I was saying to myself: "Ed, my boy, this is Everest—you've got to push it a bit harder!" My solar plexus was tight with fear as I ploughed on. Half-way up I stopped, exhausted. I could look down 10,000 feet between my legs, and I have never felt more insecure. Anxiously I waved Tenzing to me.

"What do you think of it, Tenzing?" And the immediate response, "Very bad, very dangerous!" "Do you think we should go on?" and there came the familiar reply that never helped you much but never let you down: "Just as you wish!" I waved him on to take a turn at leading. Changing the lead much more frequently now, we made our unhappy way upwards, sometimes sliding back and wiping out half a dozen steps, and never feeling confident that at any moment the whole slope might not avalanche. In the hope of some sort of a belay we traversed a little towards the rocks, but found no help in their smooth, hold-less surfaces. We plunged on upwards. And then I noticed that, a little above us, the left-hand rock ridge turned into snow and the snow looked firm and safe. Laboriously and carefully we climbed across some steep rock, and I sank my ice-axe shaft into the snow of the ridge. It went in firm and hard. The pleasure of this safe belay after all the uncertainty below was like a reprieve to a condemned man. Strength flowed into my limbs, and I could feel my tense nerves and muscles relaxing. I swung my ice-axe at the slope and started chipping a line of steps upwards—it was very steep, but seemed so gloriously safe. Tenzing, an inexperienced but enthusiastic step cutter, took a turn and chopped a haphazard line of steps up another pitch. We were making fast time now and the slope was starting to ease off. Tenzing gallantly waved me through, and with a growing feeling of excitement I cramponed up some firm slopes to the rounded top of the South Summit. It was only 9 a.m.

With intense interest I looked at the vital ridge leading to the summit—the ridge about which Evans and Bourdillon had made such gloomy forecasts. At first glance it was an exceedingly impressive and indeed a frightening sight. In the narrow crest of this ridge, the basic rock of the mountain had a thin capping of snow and ice—ice that reached out over the East face in enormous cornices, overhanging and treacherous, and only waiting for the careless foot of the mountaineer to break off and crash 10,000 feet to the Kangshung glacier. And from the cornices the snow dropped steeply to the left to merge with the enormous rock bluffs which towered 8,000 feet above the Western Cwm. It was impressive all right! But as I looked my fears started to lift a little. Surely I could see a route there? For this snow slope on the left, although very steep and exposed, was practically continuous for the first half of the ridge, although in places the great cornices reached hungrily across. If we could make a route along that snow slope, we could go quite a distance at least.

With a feeling almost of relief, I set to work with my ice-axe and cut a platform for myself just down off the top of the South Summit. Tenzing did the same, and then we removed our oxygen sets and sat down. The day was still remarkably fine, and we felt no discomfort through our thick layers of clothing from either wind or cold. We had a drink out of Tenzing's water-bottle and then I checked our oxygen supplies. Tenzing's bottle was practically exhausted, but mine still had a little in it. As well as this, we each had a full bottle. I decided that the difficulties ahead would demand as light a weight on our backs as possible so determined to use only the full bottles. I removed Tenzing's empty bottle and my nearly empty one and laid them in the snow. With particular care I connected up our last bottles and tested to see that they were working efficiently. The needles on the dials were steady on 3,300 lb. per square inch pressure—they were very full bottles holding just over 800 litres of oxygen each. At three litres a minute we consumed 180 litres an hour, and this meant a total endurance of nearly four and a half hours. This didn't seem much for the problems ahead, but I was determined if necessary to cut down to two litres a minute for the homeward trip.

I was greatly encouraged to find how, even at 28,700 feet and with no oxygen, I could work out slowly but clearly the problems of mental arithmetic that the oxygen supply demanded. A correct answer was imperative—any mistake could well mean a trip with no return. But we had no time to waste. I stood up and took a series of photographs in every direction, then thrust my camera back to its warm home inside my clothing. I heaved my now pleasantly light oxygen load on to my back and connected up my tubes. I did the same for Tenzing, and we were ready to go. I asked Tenzing to belay me and then, with a growing air of excitement, I cut a broad and safe line of steps down to the snow saddle below the South Summit. I wanted an easy route when we came back up here weak and tired. Tenzing came down the steps and joined me, and then belayed once again.

I moved along on to the steep snow slope on the left side of the ridge. With the first blow of my ice-axe my excitement increased. The snow—to my astonishment—was crystalline and hard. A couple of rhythmical blows of the ice-axe produced a step that was big enough even for our oversize high-altitude boots. But best of all the steps were strong and safe. A little conscious of the great drops beneath me, I chipped a line of steps for the full length of the rope—forty feet—and then forced the shaft of my ice-axe firmly into the snow. It made a fine belay and I looped the rope around it. I waved to Tenzing to join me, and as he moved slowly and carefully along the steps I took in the rope. When he reached me, he thrust his ice-axe into the snow and protected me with a good tight rope as I went on cutting steps. It was exhilarating work—the summit ridge of Everest, the crisp snow and the smooth easy blows of the ice-axe all combined to make me feel a greater sense of power than I had ever felt at great altitudes before. I went on cutting for rope length after rope length.

We were now approaching a point where one of the great cornices was encroaching on to our slope. We'd have to go down to the rocks to avoid it. I cut a line of steps steeply down the slope to a small ledge on top of the rocks. There wasn't much room, but it made a reasonably safe stance. I waved to Tenzing to join me. As he came down to me I realised there was something wrong with him. I had been so absorbed in the technical

problems of the ridge that I hadn't thought much about Tenzing, except for a vague feeling that he seemed to move along the steps with unnecessary slowness. But now it was quite obvious that he was not only moving extremely slowly, but he was breathing quickly and with difficulty and was in considerable distress. I immediately suspected his oxygen set and helped him down on to the ledge so that I could examine it. The first thing I noticed was that from the outlet of his face-mask there were hanging some long icicles. I looked at it more closely and found that the outlet tube—about two inches in diameter—was almost completely blocked up with ice. This was preventing Tenzing from exhaling freely and must have made it extremely unpleasant for him. Fortunately the outlet tube was made of rubber and by manipulating this with my hand I was able to release all the ice and let it fall out. The valves started operating and Tenzing was given immediate relief. Just as a check I examined my own set and found that it, too, had partly frozen up in the outlet tube, but not sufficiently to have affected me a great deal. I removed the ice out of it without a great deal of trouble. Automatically I looked at our pressure gauges—just over 2,900 lb. (2,900 lb. was just over 700 litres; 180 into 700 was about 4)—we had nearly four hours' endurance left. That meant we weren't going badly.

I looked at the route ahead. This next piece wasn't going to be easy. Our rock ledge was perched right on top of the enormous bluff running down into the Western Cwm. In fact, almost under my feet, I could see the dirty patch on the floor of the Cwm which I knew was Camp IV. In a sudden urge to escape our isolation I waved and shouted, and then as suddenly stopped as I realised my foolishness. Against the vast expanse of Everest, 8,000 feet above them, we'd be quite invisible to the best binoculars. I turned back to the problem ahead. The rock was far too steep to attempt to drop down and go around this pitch. The only thing to do was to try to shuffle along the ledge and cut handholds in the bulging ice that was trying to push me off it. Held on a tight rope by Tenzing, I cut a few handholds and then thrust my ice-axe as hard as I could into the solid snow and ice. Using this to take my weight I moved quickly along the ledge. It proved easier than I had anticipated. A few

more handholds, another quick swing across them, and I was able to cut a line of steps up on to a safe slope and chop out a roomy terrace from which to belay Tenzing as he climbed up to me.

We were now fast approaching the most formidable obstacle on the ridge—a great rock step. This step had always been visible in aerial photographs, and in 1951 on the Everest Reconnaissance we had seen it quite clearly with glasses from Thyangboche. We had always thought of it as the obstacle on the ridge which could well spell defeat. I cut a line of steps across the last snow slope, and then commenced traversing over a steep rock slab that led to the foot of the great step. The holds were small and hard to see, and I brushed my snow-glasses away from my eyes. Immediately I was blinded by a bitter wind sweeping across the ridge and laden with particles of ice. I hastily replaced my glasses and blinked away the ice and tears until I could see again. But it made me realise how efficient was our clothing in protecting us from the rigours of even a fine day at 29,000 feet. Still half blinded, I climbed across the slab, and then dropped down into a tiny snow hollow at the foot of the step. And here Tenzing joined me.

I looked anxiously up at the rocks. Planted squarely across the ridge in a vertical bluff, they looked extremely difficult, and I knew that our strength and ability to climb steep rock at this altitude would be severely limited. I examined the route out to the left. By dropping fifty or a hundred feet over steep slabs, we might be able to get around the bottom of the bluff, but there was no indication that we'd be able to climb back on to the ridge again. And to lose any height now might be fatal. Search as I would, I was unable to see an easy route up to the step or, in fact, any route at all. Finally, in desperation I examined the right-hand end of the bluff. Attached to this and overhanging the precipitous East face was a large cornice. This cornice, in preparation for its inevitable crash down the mountainside, had started to lose its grip on the rock and a long narrow vertical crack had been formed between the rock and the ice. The crack was large enough to take the human frame, and though it offered little security, it was at least a route. I

quickly made up my mind—Tenzing had an excellent belay and we must be near the top—it was worth a try.

Before attempting the pitch, I produced my camera once again. I had no confidence that I would be able to climb this crack, and with a surge of competitive pride which unfortunately afflicts even mountaineers, I determined to have proof that at least we had reached a good deal higher than the South Summit. I took a few photographs and then made another rapid check of the oxygen—2,550 lb. pressure. (2,550 from 3,300 leaves 750. 750 over 3,300 is about two-ninths. Two-ninths off 800 litres leaves about 600 litres. 600 divided by 180 is nearly $3\frac{1}{2}$.) Three and a half hours to go. I examined Tenzing's belay to make sure it was a good one and then slowly crawled inside the crack.

In front of me was the rock wall, vertical but with a few promising holds. Behind me was the ice-wall of the cornice, glittering and hard but cracked here and there. I took a hold on the rock in front and then jammed one of my crampons hard into the ice behind. Leaning back with my oxygen set on the ice, I slowly levered myself upwards. Searching feverishly with my spare boot, I found a tiny ledge on the rock and took some of the weight off my other leg. Leaning back on the cornice, I fought to regain my breath. Constantly at the back of my mind was the fear that the cornice might break off, and my nerves were taut with suspense. But slowly I forced my way up—wriggling and jamming and using every little hold. In one place I managed to force my ice-axe into a crack in the ice, and this gave me the necessary purchase to get over a holdless stretch. And then I found a solid foothold in a hollow in the ice, and next moment I was reaching over the top of the rock and pulling myself to safety. The rope came tight—its forty feet had been barely enough.

I lay on the little rock ledge panting furiously. Gradually it dawned on me that I was up the step, and I felt a glow of pride and determination that completely subdued my temporary feelings of weakness. For the first time on the whole expedition I really knew I was going to get to the top. "It will have to be pretty tough to stop us now" was my thought. But I couldn't entirely ignore the feeling of astonishment and wonder that I'd

been able to get up such a difficulty at 29,000 feet even with oxygen.

When I was breathing more evenly I stood up and, leaning over the edge, waved to Tenzing to come up. He moved into the crack and I gathered in the rope and took some of his weight. Then he, in turn, commenced to struggle and jam and force his way up until I was able to pull him to safety—gasping for breath. We rested for a moment. Above us the ridge continued on as before—enormous overhanging cornices on the right and steep snow slopes on the left running down to the rock bluffs. But the angle of the snow slopes was easing off. I went on chipping a line of steps, but thought it safe enough for us to move together in order to save time. The ridge rose up in a great series of snakelike undulations which bore away to the right, each one concealing the next. I had no idea where the top was. I'd cut a line of steps around the side of one undulation and another would come into view. We were getting desperately tired now and Tenzing was going very slowly. I'd been cutting steps for almost two hours, and my back and arms were starting to tire. I tried cramponing along the slope without cutting steps, but my feet slipped uncomfortably down the slope. I went on cutting. We seemed to have been going for a very long time and my confidence was fast evaporating. Bump followed bump with maddening regularity. A patch of shingle barred our way, and I climbed dully up it and started cutting steps around another bump. And then I realised that this was the last bump, for ahead of me the ridge dropped steeply away in a great corniced curve, and out in the distance I could see the pastel shades and fleecy clouds of the highlands of Tibet.

To my right a slender snow ridge climbed up to a snowy dome about forty feet above our heads. But all the way along the ridge the thought had haunted me that the summit might be the crest of a cornice. It was too late to take risks now. I asked Tenzing to belay me strongly, and I started cutting a cautious line of steps up the ridge. Peering from side to side and thrusting with my ice-axe, I tried to discover a possible cornice, but everything seemed solid and firm. I waved Tenzing up to me. A few more whacks of the ice-axe, a few very weary steps, and we were on the summit of Everest.

XXIII

DEATH OF OWEN GLYNNE JONES

from

MOUNTAIN ADVENTURES AT HOME AND ABROAD¹

by GEORGE D. ABRAHAM

Owen Glynne Jones, the man who made Lakeland rock-climbing a popular pursuit and author of that mountain classic "Rock-climbing in the English Lake District," made his name as an Alpine climber with his ascent of the Dent Blanche, 14,317 feet, in 1891.

The mountain had a bad reputation for treacherous weather which brought with it difficult conditions of rock and ice and by a strange twist of fate it was upon this very mountain that Jones met his death eight years later when climbing with F. W. Hill and three local guides.



UP from the great precipices into the cloudless firmament wisps of morning mist rise lazily, and the guides' spirits rise in unison. At Haudères, where the Ferpèche and Arolla valleys divide, a party of Englishmen soon arrives. Their glowing, suntanned faces and sprightly movements indicate perfect physique and perfect health. The peaks of Arolla have been their training ground. After a hurried farewell, most of the travellers continue downwards. Two—Owen Glynne Jones and Mr. F. W. Hill—are left behind. Soon the little hamlet is disturbed. A party is starting for the West Ridge of the Great White Tooth, and the wherewithal is required for spending a night out on the rocks above the Alpe de Bricolla, or Abricolla, as it is now commonly called. A porter is procured, and these various matters are soon settled.

Four hours later, after a tiring climb through the heavy air of the narrow valley, they emerge from the friendly shade of the pines. Before Abricolla is reached, doubts arise as to the advantage of the higher gîte, the enervating influences have done their work, and Owen Glynne Jones comes to sleep the second and last time at the well-known châteaux. While the evening meal is being prepared, he strays from his companions

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and looks forth on the enthralling prospect. The shattered surface of the *Ferpècle Glacier* lies below in the gathering gloom. The sweeping curves lead the eye skyward, and around the vast upper amphitheatre of the great peaks that

“like giants stand,
To sentinel enchanted land.”

All the old friends are here, from the bulky form of the *Veisivi* and the spiry needle of the *Za* to the overpowering mass of the *Dent Blanche*, each with character marked in everlasting form. Perchance he recalls the joyous days spent on ridge and summit; the pulses quicken, and the hour-glass runs in golden sands.

Then, as darkness creeps slowly upwards, they sit around the dying embers of the fire, chatting keenly, and at times merrily, of climbs and climbers. Probably the young amateur recalls the joke about his April ascent of the *Dent Blanche*: how the guides quelled the doubts of their parents by hinting at an attempt of the *Tête Blanche*, feeling all the while that this would be the full extent of the “mad young Englishman’s” powers. How his eyes twinkled when he mimicked the guides’ astonishment as they gradually realised that they had “caught a Tartar.” Even at the last gendarme they looked back inquiringly, but it was ever, “Lead on!” The cry, “Hold! enough!” came not until the actual top was reached.

But the *Dent Blanche* is still there; it awaits their coming. At 3 a.m. the next morning the party quits the last rough signs of civilisation, and launches forth into darkness made visible by the light of Alpine lanterns. The faint glimmer of dawn sees them threading the maze-like ice-fall. The deep silence is broken only by the swishing smack of the ice-axe as steps are hewn, now on some icy ridge with unfathomable blackness below on either hand, or anon across the frost-bound breast of some slippery crevasse. At times towers of ice loom threateningly, their impending snowy crests apparently on the verge of falling. The danger is almost negligible at this early hour, but the travellers are aware of its presence.

“In single file they move, and stop their breath
For fear they should dislodge the overhanging snows.”

Away behind and below, the crash of falling fragments bespeaks that ceaseless mountain warfare where, slowly and stealthily, the creeping glacier monster thrusts itself through the rocky jaws between Mont Miné and its neighbour. The guide's instinct prevails unerringly. Gradually the party draws up to the base of the titanic ridge whose foot cleaves the icy pedestal to invisible depths, and whose crest towers upwards to heights now also invisible.

At the foot of the rocks a short discussion arises. The only other party to ascend the mountain from this side has obviated the lower, third portion of the ridge by passing up the snow and ice slopes to the right. Not so on this occasion. The West Ridge must be conquered in its entirety. Soon the party is at work in real earnest, and dawn comes on apace. The lanterns are packed away, for

"Night's candles are burnt out, and jocund day
Stands tiptoe on the misty mountain tops."

At first progress is fast and almost furious; the conditions are perfect, and everybody is in high spirits. But ere long the mountain asserts itself; huge, smooth, steep slabs bespeak serious difficulties. A certain section entails assistance for the leader, and those who follow realise that the trusty Alpine rope is a friend in need and a friend indeed. Thus far the climbers have moved on two ropes. The last man of the first three bends down breathlessly after a tough struggle with an overhanging corner, and suggests to his friend below that the two ropes should be joined. In this way time will be saved, and there is no hesitation in the acceptance of the proffered help. Thus the large party is roped for the last time in the following order: Furrer, Zurbriggen, Jones, Vuignier and Hill.

The mighty ridge yields all those glorious opportunities which delight the expert mountaineer. Roughly speaking, though built on extensive and complicated lines, it resembles a huge Cyclopean staircase. The riser of each step is usually broad and vertical, and the tread consists of a sharp-crested arête.

The latter portions usually delay the party little; the way is obvious, almost painfully so where they sit astride its pointed tip, and edge onwards and upwards. Where the narrow portion

abuts against the steep extended face, smooth slabs intervene, and here the uncertainties of ways and means call for much skill and discrimination. At one puzzling place Furrer unropes and makes a solitary excursion on the great crags in order to find the best point of attack. After a long horizontal traverse across the face, he finds a chimney leading ahead, and calls on his companions to follow. They are soon united, and up, ever up they go, now on the crest of the ridge again supreme above, and thoughtless of "the sudden deeps, where slip or fall brings swiftly crashing end." Wherever the almost holdless slabs permit, a way is forced up the central tip of the ridge; but many a time and oft in the upper reaches the leader has to be pushed or assisted up overhanging pitches, where all but the last man are also glad to turn a companion into a human footstool.

Higher and higher they move; the work is of enthralling interest, and time speeds swiftly. At these loftier altitudes ice begins to mask some of the holds, and for some time a repulsive-looking gendarme towering above has been causing misgivings. At last Furrer, Zurbriggen and Jones emerge above a bulge in the ridge, and the *mauvais pas*, the last of all, stands revealed in front, 60 feet or so away. A gently inclined ridge of rock gives access to its base. Few words have been spoken thus far, but at this point Hill calls up to Jones to ask the time, as his own watch has been left behind. "Almost ten o'clock," comes the reply. Then, his face glowing with characteristic enthusiasm, Jones glances down the tremendous sweep of the almost conquered ridge, and cries, "Isn't it glorious?" These are practically the last words that pass between the friends.

When the last man arrives above the steep step in the ridge he sees the others advancing to the attack. On the left, the mountain's tremendous northerly precipice descends in one mighty leap to the glacier; on the right, the downward gaze is arrested by the savage recesses of the great couloir, an almost vertical funnel of ice, 2,000 feet deep. In front rises the great gendarme, its closeness, as is so often the case, minimising the appearance of difficulty. It has an extended front, and is bounded on the right by snow and ice slopes which would give a long, uninteresting and tedious route to the top. The gendarme seems more tempting, and the obvious way appears to lie up a sloping

chimney on the right side, but this is glazed with ice and now impossible. About 30 feet to the left of this chimney a smooth buttress attracts the leader's attention. It must be noted that Jones offers no advice on the choice of route. The *bête noire* of the ascent is scarcely more than 10 feet in height, but the finish verges on the impossible by reason of the tiny hand-holds. It has not yet been ascended, though the descent has been effected by means of a doubled rope. In the exhilaration of hardly won success the climbers scarcely realise this fact.

From a distance of about 60 feet Hill watches the proceedings. As a base of operations, Furrer, Zurbriggen and Jones make use of a narrow, uncomfortable ledge which affords a traverse below the buttress: about half-way between the last man and the others, Vuignier occupies a good standing-place, with the rope hitched around the rocks behind him.

Now Furrer mounts the buttress slowly and deliberately, for the situation is severely sensational. The small hand-holds prove insufficient, and Zurbriggen jams an ice-axe against the rocks to support the leader's wavering feet. This proves unsteady, and Jones is called away from a more secure position to assist. No obvious belay for the rope is available. With the support of the axe, now firmly held, Furrer feels anxiously above; again and again his hands wander over the buttress in search of a satisfactory grip for the fingers. The buttress bulges forward awkwardly; there is a sense of peril at every inspiration. The next upward movement is obviously the crux of the climb. A good ledge is seen a few inches higher; the very shortness of the stretch is its most insidious danger. At last Furrer moves; his foot almost leaves the ice-axe. At that moment his fingers suddenly slip off the insufficient holds. Before the terrible calamity is realised, he has tumbled backwards on Zurbriggen and Jones, and all three fall together. The others are in a position of utter helplessness. No climbing-rope can withstand the strain; human aid is unavailing. The last man turns away and instinctively grasps the adjacent rocks. So sudden is the crisis that no human cry stirs the vast solitudes. He hears Vuignier go, and expects every instant to be torn from the rocks and hurled into space. Again the unexpected happens: the strain never comes. He looks around. A glance below reveals the broken rope swinging

slowly across the face, and still farther down his companions are visible crashing lifeless and helpless down the mountain.

The human intellect is slow to realise the extent of such an awful catastrophe. In the present case, so far as the survivor is concerned, the uppermost feeling at first is one of astonishment to find himself still alive. Utter despair and collapse would seem inevitable in such a fearful situation, but soon the natural thought of self-preservation arises. Iron nerves and physical fitness at last assert themselves, and the problem ahead is faced in desperate earnest. It is hopeless to attempt to ascend where the guides have failed; to descend is obviously impossible; the only alternative is to find a way up the deep snow and ice slope to the right of the gendarme. A kindly Providence watches over the brave climber; he hits on the very route which is now considered the only safe way of passing the *mauvais pas*. Earlier in the day a party has been seen on the ordinary south ridge, and the thought of joining them lends strength and speed to his efforts.

An hour later he stands on the deserted summit. He calls loudly and frantically, but no answering cry breaks the overwhelming stillness: the other party are out of sight and sound. He turns to the descent and follows in their footsteps with all reasonable haste, hoping to overtake them. But all in vain. On the lowest gendarme a sudden mist enwraps the mountain, and the way off the rocks is indiscernible. Fortune now seems to desert the climber; a snowstorm borne on the wings of a life-chilling breeze sweeps across the ridge. Shelter is found in a recess on the lee-side of the rocks, and here, practically devoid of sustenance except for a few raisins, he spends the ensuing night.

The mist clings to the crags until the following midday, Tuesday, but then it clears and a start downwards is made. At last the snow-covered rocks are passed, and the lower part of the Wandfluh reached. After two or three hours of futile efforts, a route is found down the cliff by way of a series of chimneys leading to the surface of the Schönbühl Glacier. At sunset he passes wearily along the high moraine of the Zmutt Glacier. Later on, the light in the Staffel Alp acts as a guide, but it goes out early, and the way thence is lost. Stumbling and falling occasionally, the climber, now more or less delirious with the terrible experience, is at last overcome with fatigue, and perforce

spends another night by the side of the torrent. He awakes late next morning, but help is now close at hand. The path is soon found, and before midday Zermatt is stirred with the terrible story of disaster. The news flashes far and near. Within a short space of time search parties consisting of guides and willing experts start both from Zermatt and Evolena.

The arduous and dangerous work of recovery is well and nobly done. The fallen guides are laid to rest in their native valleys. Owen Glynne Jones sleeps in the little God's acre at Evolena. Nature's sweetest and grandest music hovers ever around. Through the light air floats the chant of the wind through the swaying pines, and the song of many mountain waters fills the valley, but, above and beyond all, the voice of the Dent Blanche roars forth intermittently in thunderous avalanche. The path to the mountains runs almost within touch of his resting-place. The heavy tread of the climber's foot and the click of the ice-axe are often heard as they pass. Now and again strong men with weathered, sun-tanned faces turn aside and bow their heads in silence over the plain, stone slab; let it not be accounted unto them for weakness if they pay their homage of tears before they go.

XXIV

DEATH OF ART GILKEY

from

K₂ THE SAVAGE MOUNTAIN¹

by CHARLES HOUSTON AND ROBERT BATES

In the summer of 1939 K₂ was the centre of one of the greatest mountain dramas of all times when Dudley Wolfe, a member of the Second American Karakoram Expedition, lay beleaguered in a tiny tent, cut off from his companions, nearly five miles up on K₂. There followed an heroic rescue attempt by four Sherpa porters who climbed up to within 1,500 feet of Wolfe and spent the night on a narrow ledge of rock. Three of them fought their way up to the lone climber the next day but found him too weak to climb down and too heavy to be carried. Forced to make their way back to their camp below they fed him and arranged to return next day. Leaving one Sherpa behind at Camp VI the other three set out once more to the rescue, but since that date, July 31, no trace of them or of Wolfe has been found.

Thereafter the mountain remained undisturbed until June 1953, when the Houston expedition was encamped at its base. This expedition too was involved in dramatic circumstances when it was trapped in three small tents 25,500 feet up at Camp VIII in a storm of the utmost violence for a period of ten days. Tragedy came to it unexpectedly when Art Gilkey, a geologist from Iowa, developed thrombophlebitis. There could be no question of resuming the upward climb. All that remained was to hope for fine weather and an opportunity to lower the sick man down the mountain. Even so, all present secretly knew that such a feat was impossible. Nevertheless, they were determined to try.

With the storm still raging, Art's further decline made the need to set off imperative and on August 10th the descent was commenced. This story tells of the initial stages of the return journey and the further near-tragedy it involved and terminates with the disappearance and death of Gilkey. In manœuvring their way down an ice slope one of the members fell dragging the others with him, but by a miracle they were saved. Several of the men were sick or injured but all fought their way back to the safety of the base camp on August 15th.

This particular account is contributed by Robert Bates.



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WE all knew now that some of us might never get down the mountain alive. Each had long recognised the near impossibility of evacuating an injured man from the upper ledges of K2. We had told one another that "if somebody broke a leg, you never could get him down the mountain," but now that we were faced with Gilkey's helplessness, we realised that we *had* to get him down. We didn't know how, but we knew that we had to do it.

Schoening in particular, and also Bob Craig and Dee Molenaar, had done a lot of mountain rescue work, and the rest of us placed great confidence in their faith that somehow we could get our casualty to Base Camp. Gilkey's high morale and his confidence in us was a great boost to our spirits and we faced the job ahead with strong determination. When on the morning of August 10th Charlie Houston thrust his shoulders through the tunnel entrance of the tent where Schoening, Streather and I, shoulder rubbing shoulder, had tossed during the long night hours, we spoke almost in unison: "How is he?"

"We've got to take him down," said the doctor. "His other leg has a clot now and he can't last long *here*."

The wind was hammering the tent fabric so hard that we had to yell at one another. Drifts of fine powder snow were sifting in through a strained seam in the tent vestibule, though we had done our best to keep the shelter airtight, and we could feel the whole tent vibrate as gusts stretched the fabric to the utmost.

"What? Move in this storm?" said someone.

"We've got to," said Houston. "He'll soon be dead if we don't get him down."

Nothing needed saying after that, for we knew what this decision meant. All of us had fought mountain storms before, but we had never seen anything like the duration and violence of this furious wind and snow that was still battering us. We all knew the story of the storm on Nanga Parbat in 1934, when nine members of a German expedition had died of exhaustion while battling the wind and snow. Willy Merkl, Uli Wieland and Willi Welzenback had been famous mountaineers, but a storm had exhausted them and killed them one by one. Here on K2 we had not only the storm to fight but the steepest part

of the mountain, and we were trying to bring down these precipitous slopes a crippled companion as well!

We all realised that our adventure had now become grim, for the odds against getting Art down were obvious, and our own position was getting more critical all the time. While Houston and Schoening were easing Art out of his tent into the storm, the rest of us began packing light loads to take down. We would need one tent in case of emergency, and we took the Gerry tent, our lightest one. We also might need a stove and pot, and some meat bars, chocolate, or quick-energy food that needed no cooking. Often the effects of altitude so weaken one's determination that doing nothing becomes a positive pleasure, but this was no time for lethargy, and as we moved purposefully out of the tents into the stinging blasts of snow, we knew that we had to move fast, while fingers and toes still had feeling. Little was spoken. Each of us realised that he was beginning the most dangerous day's work of his lifetime.

Gilkey seemed in no pain as we wrapped him in the smashed tent, put his feet in a rucksack, and tied nylon ropes to him in such a way that they cradled him. Four ropes, tied to this cradle, could be held by one man ahead, one man behind, and one on either side. We had already put on all our warm clothing—sweaters, wool jackets, down jackets and nylon parkas—and stripped our packs to the minimum. As we worked, the disabled man watched the preparations silently. He was an experienced mountaineer and realised what all of us were up against. But he knew also that we would never leave him, and that we would bring him down safely if it were humanly possible. Art's cap was pulled down over his face, which looked drawn and bluish-grey, but he gave a wan smile whenever someone asked, "How is it going?"

"Just fine," he would say. "Just fine." And his mouth would smile. He never showed a moment's fear or the slightest lack of confidence, but he realised of course that he had been stricken by something that was likely to be fatal, that his condition was getting worse, and that he was 9,000 feet above Base Camp in a terrible monsoon storm. The nearest tent, at Camp VI, was 2,000 feet below. He knew that we could not carry him down the tricky route we had come up, and that we must go only

where we could lower him. Even in perfect weather with all men in top physical condition, the task might prove impossible—yet Art Gilkey could smile, and his smile gave us strength.

While we were adjusting the tow ropes, Schoening and Molenaar strapped on their crampons and disappeared into the storm. They were to find the best route past the dangerous avalanche slope that had blocked us a few days before, and to go over to the Camp VII cache to get a climbing rope that was strung on the ice slope just above. It would be useful in the descent. After their departure Houston called Base Camp on the walkie-talkie and told Ata-Ullah our plans. "It's pretty desperate, Ata," he said grimly, "but we can't wait. We're starting down now. We'll call you at three o'clock."

Each man took his place on a rope tied to Gilkey and for a couple of hundred yards we lunged hard at the tow ropes to pull Art through the knee-deep drifts of powder snow; then gravity took over and we had to hold back just as strongly to keep our helpless 185-pound load from plunging into the abyss. The steep slope we were on disappeared below us into nothingness. Was there a cliff there, a jumping-off place? We strained our eyes peering into the storm, but we could not wait for clearing weather. Instead we had to depend on Schoening and Molenaar, who had gone ahead to scout out the way. As we descended, Craig and Bell pulled the front ropes, one on each side, and Houston directed operations from a point immediately behind Gilkey, while Streather and I anchored the rope higher up. Gradually we worked our way to a rock ridge, climbed down alongside it, and then began to lower Gilkey down a steep snow slope leading to a snow chute and an ice gully below. This route was not the one we would have taken had Gilkey been able to walk, but now we had no choice: we could go only where we could lower our companion, and we had faith that the two men ahead would find a route down. Once we were well started, return to Camp VIII would be impossible for any of us.

The wind and cold seeped insidiously through our layers of warm clothing so that by the end of the third hour none of us had feeling in his toes any longer, and grotesque icicles hung from our eyebrows, beards and moustaches. Goggles froze over

and we continually raised them on our foreheads in order to see how to handle the rope. Moving the sick man was frightfully slow. We had to belay one another as well as Gilkey, and our numb fingers would not move quickly. Somehow, when we got to the steepest pitch, however, someone managed to tie two 120-foot nylon ropes together and we started to lower Gilkey down, down in the only direction the slope would permit. Houston and I, braced on the storm-swept ridge, backs to the wind, could feel the terrible gusts trying to hurl us off the rocks. We could not see where we were lowering Art, but we could hear faint shouts from Schoening and Molenaar, who were out of sight below. As we slowly paid out the coils of rope, thankful that they were of nylon and would not freeze in kinks, Bob Craig unroped from us and climbed down alongside the injured man to direct the descent. Soon he was completely obscured, too, but Streather climbed down to where he could see Craig's arm signals, yet still see us, and so we belayers had communication with Craig and Gilkey and knew whether to lower or to hold the rope. Alternatively we anchored and paid out line until we were nearly frozen, and our arms were strained when Tony Streather, whom we could barely see, turned and shouted, "Hold tight! They're being carried down in an avalanche!"

We held. Our anchorage was good and the rope stretched taut. For a moment snow flurries blotted out everything, and then we could hear a muffled shout from Streather. "They're still there!" The rope had broken loose a wind-slab avalanche of powder snow that had roared down over both men, blotting them from sight. Craig clung to the rope to Gilkey, and held on to it for his life. The pull of the hissing particles must have been terrible, but the avalanche was of unconsolidated snow. The falling powder slithered out of sight and down off the side of the mountain, where it must have kept falling long after we could hear it. When it was gone, Craig still clung to the rope, grey and very chilled. Both men were safe. The grim descent continued.

Schoening and Molenaar, who were not far from Camp VII, soon were able to reach Gilkey, but it seemed like hours to the four of us on the icy rocks of the wind-swept ridge before they

shouted up that they had him strongly belayed "on the edge of a cliff," and we could climb down. Stiffly we shifted from our frozen positions, and climbed clumsily down the steep, crumbly rocks to the snow chute above the ice gully. Houston and I were on one rope, Bell and Streather on the other. All were so cold, so near exhaustion, that moving down over dangerous, snow covered ice stretched us to the limit. Through the murk of blowing snow we saw Schoening standing in front of a large, rounded rock that had become frozen on to a narrow ledge. His ice-axe was thrust deep into the snow above the rock and the rope with which he held Art Gilkey was looped tightly around the shaft of the axe. The sick man was at the edge of a 20-foot cliff, beneath which we could glimpse the ice gully dropping off steeply into the storm toward the Godwin-Austen Glacier nearly two miles below.

Schoening looked like a man from another world. So much frost had formed on our beards that faces were unrecognisable, and we knew that we were fast reaching the breaking point. We could not continue much longer without shelter from the driving storm and food to renew our energy. Some 150 yards below us to the east was the tiny shelf, at 24,500 feet, nicked into the ice slope, where Schoening and Gilkey had spent the night of July 30th during their reconnaissance above Camp VI. We had called it Camp VII or Camp VII cache. None of us had expected anyone to spend another night there, but Bob Craig, whose struggle against the avalanche had so completely exhausted him temporarily that he could hardly tie a crampon strap, had been belayed over to this site to rest and clear some of the avalanche snow that had seeped under his parka. We yelled to him to try to enlarge the ledge. Meanwhile, with Schoening anchoring the rope, we lowered Gilkey slowly over the short rock cliff until he was resting against the 45-degree ice slope. Streather, who was roped to Bell, climbed down to Gilkey. Schoening held Gilkey's rope firmly while Houston belayed me across a delicate pitch of steep, hard ice and then Houston climbed down to a point opposite the man suspended against the slope. The problem now was not to get Gilkey down, but to swing him across the steep ice slope to the ice shelf at Camp VII. Our plan was to get a firm anchorage and then

pendulum him across, but unfortunately the ice near him was too hard for axes to be driven in and the slope was relentlessly steep.

Even during the best weather conditions the manœuvre would have been dangerous, and our position at that moment I shall never forget. Schoening was belaying Gilkey, who hung 60 feet below him, suspended against the sharply angled ice. On the same level as Gilkey, and 40 feet across from him, five of us, facing into the stinging, drifting snow, were searching for a place where we could stand and anchor the rope to Gilkey as we pulled him across the ice in the direction of Craig on the ice shelf. With our spiked crampons biting the hard ice, Streather, Houston, Molenaar and I stood close together. Bell and Streather were roped together, Houston and I were on a rope together—and Molenaar had just "tied in" to a loose rope to Gilkey. He had done this when Craig had unroped and gone over to the ice shelf to rest, and it was Molenaar's precaution that saved us all, for George Bell, who was some 60 feet above us, began to descend a delicate stretch of hard ice in order to help with Gilkey's ropes. At that moment, what we had all been dreading occurred. Something threw Bell off balance and he fell.

I never saw Bell fall, but to my horror I saw Streather being dragged off the slope and making desperate efforts to jam the pick of his axe into the ice and stop. Streather had been standing above the rope from Houston to me. In almost the same instant I saw Houston swept off, and though I turned and lunged at the hard ice with the point of my axe, a terrible jerk ripped me from my hold and threw me backward headfirst down the slope. *This is it!* I thought as I landed heavily on my pack. There was nothing I could do now. We had done our best, but our best wasn't good enough. This was the end. Since nobody was on the rope with Houston and me, there was no one else to hold us, and I knew that nothing could stop us now. On the slope below, no rock jutted on which the rope between us could catch. Only thousands of feet of empty space separated us from the glacier below. It was like falling off a slanting Empire State Building six times as high as the real one.

Thrown violently backward, with the hood of my down jacket

jammed over my eyes, I had a feeling of unreality, of detachment. The future was beyond my control. All I knew was that I landed on my pack with great force, bouncing faster and faster, bumping over rocks in great thumps. The next bound I expected to take me over a cliff in a terrible drop that would finish it all, when, by a miracle, I stopped sliding.

I was on my back with my hood over my eyes and my head a yard below my feet. My arms, stretched over my head, were so completely tangled with the taut rope that I could not loosen them. I was helpless, and when I tried to move, I realised that I was balanced on the crest of some rocks and that a change of position might throw me off the edge. The rope had apparently snagged on a projection—though how and where I couldn't imagine—but it might not be securely caught. Whether it was firmly held, whether anyone else was alive, I did not know, but I didn't need to wait. Almost immediately I heard a groan coming from nearly on top of me. "Get me loose," I called, and immediately I felt the pressure of a leg braced against my shoulder and the rope was pulled off my arms.

Grabbing a rock, I swung my head around. Dee Molenaar and I were clinging to a rocky outcrop at the side of a steep ice slope, studded with rocks, about 150 to 200 feet below the place where we had been working on the ropes to Gilkey. Blood from Dee's nose trickled across his moustache and beard, and he looked badly shaken. My rope was tight to someone or something above, and I heard a distant yell, "Get your weight off that rope!" Fifty feet higher, through a mist of blowing snow, I could see Tony Streather staggering to his feet, a tangle of ropes still tight about his waist. Below me I heard a cry, "My hands are freezing!" and, looking down, to my amazement, I saw George Bell, who seconds before had been 60 feet above me. Now about 60 feet *below*, he was climbing up over the edge of nothingness. He wore neither pack nor glasses and was staggering up over the steep rocks, obviously dazed, with his hands held out grotesquely in front of him. His mittens had been ripped off in the fall, and already the colour of his hands had turned an ugly fish-belly white. If his hands were badly frozen, of course, we might never be able to get him down off the mountain.

Turning to Molenaar, I thrust my pack into his arms. Most of the lashing had ripped loose and the walkie-talkie radio, which had been on rope, was gone; my sleeping bag was half off, held by a single twist of line. Without sleeping bags we were unlikely to survive the night, no matter how we tried! Since Molenaar wore no pack, I imagined that his sleeping bag also had been torn off in the fall. Whether or not the tent someone had been carrying had survived the fall, I didn't know. "For God's sake, hold this," I yelled above the wind, placing my load in Molenaar's arms. (For all I knew, mine was the only sleeping bag to survive the fall and we must not lose it now.) The loose pack was awkward to hold securely while we were standing on such steep rock, but Molenaar grasped it and I unroped and started to climb shakily down to meet Bell. As I climbed down, I wondered about the ropes that had saved us. They were snagged to something up above, but the driving snow kept us from seeing what was holding them. Luckily I had a spare pair of dry, loosely woven Indian mitts in the pouch pocket of my parka, and when I reached Bell, whose face was grey and haggard, I helped him to put them on. Already his fingers were so stiff with cold that he couldn't move them, but balancing on projections of rock on the steep slope, we struggled to save his hands and finally forced the big white mittens past his stiff thumbs and down over his wrists.

Bell's fall had ended with him suspended over the edge of a ledge, below which the slope dropped away precipitously for thousands of feet. The weight of his pack pulled his head down, and he had lost it while trying to get right side up and back over the ledge. While Bell crouched down, working desperately to warm his hands under his parka, I left him, for Molenaar and I had seen a crumpled figure lying below a 30-foot cliff on a narrow shelf that seemed projecting over utter blankness below. It was Houston. Somehow a rope to him was snagged high above us, too. Climbing unsteadily but cautiously, for I was not roped and felt shaken by the fall, I worked my way down the steep rocks and across to the ledge. Houston was unconscious, but his eyes opened as I touched his shoulder. When he staggered to his feet, I felt relief it is impossible to describe.

"Where are we?" he asked. "What are we doing here?"

He was obviously hurt. His eyes did not focus and he appeared to be suffering from a concussion. Again and again I tried to persuade him to climb up the cliff, while Molenaar anchored the rope still attached to him from above. He didn't understand. "Where are we?" he kept saying, for my replies did not convey any meaning to him in his confused state.

The wind and blowing snow were searing our faces. We were all near exhaustion and in danger of crippling frost-bite. If we were to survive, we had to get shelter at once, or we would be so numbed by exposure that we could not protect ourselves. What had happened in the Nanga Parbat storm which had taken so many men was a grim reminder. All of us working together did not now have strength enough to pull or carry Houston up the steep rock and snow to the ice ledge, 150 feet above, which we had called Camp VII.

"Charlie," I said with the greatest intensity, remembering the names of his wife and daughter, and looking directly into his eyes, "if you ever want to see Dorcas and Penny again, climb up there *right now*!"

Somehow this demand penetrated to his brain, for with a frightened look and without a word, he turned and, belayed by Molenaar, fairly swarmed up the snowy rocks of the cliff. Instinct and years of climbing helped him now in his confused condition, for he climbed brilliantly up to Molenaar. I followed more slowly because, being fully conscious, I had a good deal of respect for this steep rock wall, and with great care I pulled myself up over the snow covered slabs. When I reached Molenaar, he was looking puzzled and very unhappy as he tried to answer Houston's repeated question, "What are we doing here?"

When I reached Molenaar, I still did not know what had caused the near disaster or how all five of us who fell had been saved. Up above, through the murk of blinding snow, I caught glimpses of Art Gilkey, anchored where he had been before the fall, but now Bob Craig was near him. Tony Streather, in a direct line above me, seemed to be untangling himself from a confused snarl of nylon climbing ropes, one of which led down to me.

Much later I learned the sequence of events that had put us

in this position and marvelled even more at our escape. When Bell fell, he pulled off Streather, who was hurled into the rope between Houston and me and became entangled with it. We were in turn knocked off by the impact, and all three of us—Streather, Houston and I—began tumbling in a blind, uncontrolled whirl toward the glacier far below. Nothing we could do could stop us now. But our time had not come. For Molenaar was standing below us on the slope, farther away from the sick man, and he had just tied one of the loose ropes from Art Gilkey about his waist. That circumstance saved us, for our wild fall sent us all into and across the rope from Gilkey to Molenaar, and somehow Streather fouled on to this rope too. But our impact had thrown Molenaar head-first down the slope, and we all bounded on unchecked until stopped by the tightening of the rope from Gilkey to Molenaar—a rope in which Streather was now completely tangled. Gilkey was not pulled loose, for he was anchored by Schoening, who stood on a rock ledge 60 feet above him, and the whole strain of the five falling men, plus Gilkey, was transmitted to Schoening, the youngest member of the party. Fortunately for us all, Schoening is an expert belayer, and his skill and quick thinking saved our lives. Later he told us how he did it.

By the time I returned to Molenaar and Houston, it was clear that through some miracle every climber was still able to move under his own power, but our exposure to the wind-driven snow was chilling us dangerously; we had to move fast to take shelter before we became too numb to set up a tent or became so crippled by frost-bite that we would never be able to continue the descent. Since Molenaar's leg hurt and he didn't feel like moving much, I took Charlie Houston's rope and began climbing slowly up toward the ice ledge at Camp VII. I couldn't hurry to save my life. Houston was obviously confused, but by instinct he climbed well and did what was asked. I hadn't climbed far when Tony Streather threw me a rope-end, and then Bob Craig returned from anchoring Art Gilkey and he and Streather took over the task of escorting Houston to the ledge. Craig had not seen the fall, but had looked up suddenly and been horrified to see the slope bare except for Schoening and Gilkey and a solitary ice-axe with its pick end jabbed into the ice. At that

moment a cloud of snow had blown across the ice, blotting out everything. When it cleared, Schoening, whose tight grip on the rope was freezing his hands, called to Craig to help him to anchor Gilkey. The sick man had not fallen, and he lay suspended against the ice as he had been at the time of the accident. He was probably the warmest of us all, but we could not continue to move him until the injured were cared for and we had more manpower to help get him across the slope.

When Craig reached him, Art handed over his ice-axe, which he had retained for use in the descent. To make a secure anchorage was not easy, and Craig, still exhausted from his struggle against the avalanche, was not secured by anyone while he did it, but he skillfully found firm snow and drove in Art's ice-axe right up to the head. He told the sick man that we would return for him as soon as we had a tent up. Gilkey understood. Not until then, when Craig had an ice-axe firmly embedded, could Pete Schoening release his grip—which had held six men!—and begin to warm his freezing hands. Craig had not been involved in the accident, but all the rest of us owed our lives to Schoening's skill, courage and technique.

Fortunately the tent had not been in one of the lost packs, but as I started to unroll it, the wind threatened to sweep it off the mountain. Craig and I were trying to wrestle the corners of the tent into position when Streather, who had now anchored Gilkey with a second ice-axe, joined us to help pin the flapping edges under loose rocks till we could get anchorage for the guy ropes. The slope was so steep that the outer third of the tent was off the ledge and overhanging, so that it was impossible to keep the wind from sucking under the tent and trying to tear it away.

We were fortunate that this was our smallest two-man tent, for it held the ledge better than a wider one. Actually, in Exeter before the expedition, we had thought it too small for two men and had almost failed to bring it. Pitching the tent was frustrating, for each time we would secure one corner, another corner would shudder loose. Finally we tied the front guy rope to a rock piton and lashed the inside corners as well as we could to projecting rocks. When Bob Craig later pounded in a Bernays ice-piton, we felt somewhat safer, though the nylon shroud line

attached to it didn't look too strong and the outer section of the tent bulged out over the slope. If someone inside forgot how precariously the tent was poised and leaned against the outer wall, we knew that the fabric would probably tear or the whole tent pull loose from the little ledge, and with everyone in it roll down the mountain into space.

The moment the tent was up, we moved Bell and Houston inside, where they would be under shelter and their weight would be useful in anchoring the tent. Molenaar at this point joined them to help take care of Houston, for Dee by now had lashed my loose pack together and carried it to the ledge. His left thigh hurt and he had a cracked rib.

While these men were trying to warm themselves in the tent, the rest of us began to hack out another platform in the ice for Schoening's bivouac tent, which had previously been cached on the ledge as a safeguard for Streather and me on the day when we climbed from Camp VI to Camp VIII. This tent was meant for one person or in any emergency two, but if we could get it up, we meant to use it for three men to huddle inside.

At this moment Peter Schoening climbed down to us and declared laconically, "My hands are freezing." He too crawled into the tent to try to save his hands. All of us were still too busy to find out how Schoening had held us, for it seemed as if we would never get a platform flat enough or wide enough to pitch the bivouac tent. All our strength and energy went into chipping out an ice platform, for we had to get shelter from the bitter blast for everyone; but when we did get an uneven floor carved out, the wind whipped the fabric violently. It was like working in the slipstream behind an airplane as it taxied across the snow, spraying stinging particles behind. Finally Pete crawled out to help us insert the poles and we fastened the tent insecurely to rocks and pitons near the shelf of ice. It, too, overhung in an alarming manner.

The moment the bivouac tent was up, three of us prepared to go back for Art Gilkey. He was only 150 feet away, but a low rib of rock hid from sight the ice gully where we had left him suspended from the two widely separated ice-axes, each firmly thrust into the snow. Gilkey had called to us a couple of times

while we were desperately hacking at the slope to make a platform for the bivouac tents, but the severity of the storm and the position of the gully made it impossible to distinguish words. Gilkey sounded as if he were shouting encouragement, but the wind blurred his words, as it must have muffled our answering shouts to him. He knew that we were making a shelter and would come for him as soon as we could.

About ten minutes after Gilkey's last shout, Streather, Craig and I roped up and began to cross the slope to reach the injured man and move him somehow to the ice ledge where we now had two small tents. We knew that moving him even this short distance would take every bit of strength we had left, and we roped together carefully and braced ourselves for the effort.

Schoening would have come with us, but as he emerged from the tent, he began a fit of coughing so long and painful that it doubled him up and made us urge him to crawl back into the tent. Pete had gulped in deep draughts of frigid air while climbing up to collect the fixed rope above Camp VII earlier in the day, and apparently the cold had somehow temporarily affected his lungs. He coughed until he seemed exhausted. At the moment we were particularly dismayed by Schoening's near collapse, because he had always been strong and we were counting heavily on him to help in moving Gilkey and in getting the party down the mountain. We didn't know at the moment what his trouble was or how serious it might be, and in great distress we started out into the wind to traverse the slope to Art Gilkey. Streather and I had had our snow glasses off most of the day, because snow had frozen over the lenses, turning them almost to blinders. Apparently we had developed a touch of snow blindness, because we now seemed to be seeing everything through a very light mist. This mist was hard to distinguish from blowing snow, and we seemed to be moving in a dream. Fortunately, the wind had dropped as we reached the rock rib and looked into the gully where Art had been left suspended. What we saw there I shall never forget. The whole slope was bare of life. Art Gilkey had gone!

Our sick comrade, who had called to us a few minutes before, had disappeared. Even the two ice-axes used to anchor him safely had been torn loose. The white, wind-swept ice against

which he had been resting showed no sign that anyone had ever been there. It was as if the hand of God had swept him away.

The shock stunned us. Blowing snow stung our faces as we silently stared and stared, but the slope remained empty. Something about it had changed, however, for there seemed to be a groove on the lower part of the slope that had not been there before. A snow or ice avalanche must have swept the sick man away scant minutes before we came to get him. As Craig and I belayed Streather out on to the centre of the gully, he looked down past his cramponed feet to where the slope disappeared into the storm below. We called and shouted, but all of us knew that there would be no answer. Nobody could slide off that slope out of sight and remain alive. Dazed and incredulous, we turned and plodded back to the tents.